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THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF RAMMOHUN ROY

A survey of his writings on religion particularly
in Persian, Sanskrit, and Bengali

by

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The religious ideas of Rammohun Roy and his role as a reformer have not yet been properly evaluated. Two extreme and contradictory views about his achievements are often found. The one elevates him too high in the category of a superman,[1] and the other denounces his efforts as a complete failure.[2]

The present thesis tries to analyse Rammohun's religious ideas and to determine how exactly these ideas contributed primarily to the new conception of Hinduism that would emerge. It therefore

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1. "To him, all mysteries were unveiled, and all idols broken. He was the peer of the Voltaires and the Volneys, the Diderots and the Herders across the seas; and he had seen and travelled beyond them all, a modern Ulysses voyaging in the land of the setting sun, and descending - not once not twice, but many times into dark underworld, to bring messages from the old prophets in the Night of ages". Brajendranath Seal. *Rammohun: the universal man.* Calcutta, 1933. p.28.
   Or, "In this dark gloom of India's degeneration Rammohun rose up, a luminous star in the firmament of India's history, with prophetic purity of vision, and unconquerable heroism of soul. He shed radiance all over the land; he rescued us from the penury of self-oblivion". Rabindranath Tagore's address on Rammohun. In Amal Home (ed.) *Rammohun Roy: the man and his work.* Calcutta, 1933, p.3.

2. "The pertinent question in the present context is 'what was the extent of his success in laying thereby the foundation of the present *Bangasamāj* and dispelling the darkness by light?' The reply is writ large in blazing letters upon the illuminated gates of two thousand Durga Puja pandals in Calcutta whose loud-speakers and *Ḍhāk* or trumpets proclaim in deafening noise, year after year, the failure of Rammohun to make the slightest impression from his point of view on 99.9 per cent. of the vast Hindu Samaj either in the 19th or in the 20th century". R.C. Majumdar. *On Rammohun Roy.* Calcutta, 1972. p.40.

excludes the consideration of socio-religious problems like *satī*, and the question of his immediate impact on nineteenth century society. The sources used are mainly his own writings on religion, the writings of his contemporary opponents, and the results of recent researches on him. The Persian influence which was so important in the development of his ideas, but which is often neglected by his biographers, has been taken into account. The probable connection between a 17th century Persian tract and his first published work the *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* has been explored, and the *Jawāb Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* which is often ascribed to him (though wrongly), has been translated with text, introduction and notes in *Appendix A*. The *Jawāb* gives some interesting information about him, his admirers, and his critics, and shows the nature of religious dispute during the time.

Chapter one of this thesis gives the social and religious background, and the trend of rationalistic thoughts in the country and abroad, while Chapter two outlines Rammohun as a man, and his emergence as a reformer. Chapter three surveys his writings on religion and his controversies with his opponents, and Chapter four deals with his *Brāhma Samāj* and the *Dharma Sabhā* of the orthodox Hindus. An analysis of his religious ideas and its evaluation form the contents of Chapter five, which also includes the concluding part of the thesis. A letter believed to be written by Rammohun under the assumed name Satya-Sadhun, and published in the *Calcutta Journal* is in *Appendix B*.

*   *   *   *   *

My thanks should go to the authorities of the Library, A.N.U. for making this study possible, to my colleagues in the Library for their help and encouragement, to my two supervisors, Dr. Rizvi and Dr. Jordens for their guidance, advice and useful suggestions, to Mrs. Bayin and Mrs. Ingleton for typing the thesis, and to my wife Sally who by finishing her thesis recently, has induced me to finish my own. I also thank the Trustees of the British Museum for the permission to reproduce the *Jawāb Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin*.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

Society

In the last quarter of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, the inhabitants of Bengal could be classified into five distinct groups: (a) the native aristocrats; (b) the newly emerging middle class; (c) the common people; (d) the foreign residents, and (e) the British as the ruling class.

The Zamindars (landlords) mainly constituted the aristocratic class. Some of them were patrons of art, literature, and music, and loved a luxurious life in and around the city. They entertained the British administrators in order to gain their favour, and often indulged in spending huge sums of money on marriages, funerals, *pūjās*, bird-fighting, kite-flying, and rain-gambling. *Samācāra darpana*, a Bengali newspaper, in its 12 February 1820 issue, published the news of two marriages. In one of these seven lakhs of rupees (Rs.700,000) were spent, and the other consisted of a programme for eight days - two days for the actual marriage ceremony, two days for the entertainment of the 'sahibs of England', and four days to entertain 'the Arabs, the Moghuls, and the Hindus'.[1]

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1. Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, (ed.) *Sambādapatre sekālera kathā* v.1, Calcutta, 1970. p.239.

With the rise of a middle class in society, and the emergence of the newly rich among them who wanted to invest in land for profit and respectability, the old aristocrats found difficulty in retaining their ownership on land on account of the new pressures created by the land settlement and soon they yielded their place to the newcomers

The growth of the Indian middle class was the outcome of British administration and economic policy. The education policy of the British had as its aim the creation of a class who could help them in the administration of the country and in the development of the internal resources. The educated class of Indians who emerged as a result of this policy, grew rapidly, and "they cared more for position and influence in the civil service and councils than for mass education or economic development".[1] Many of them were engaged in business, using the opportunities created by the Company. In 1807, the total capital belonging to native monied and commercial interest was "estimated to exceed 16,000,000 sterling".[2] One of the most lucrative enterprises was the money-lending business. Many of the Company's junior civil servants on their arrival used to set up an extravagant establishment of horses,

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1. B. B. Misra. *The Indian middle classes.* London, 1961 pp.10-11.

2. **Walter** Hamilton. *Geographical, statistical, and historical description of Hindostan and the adjacent countries.* v.1 London, 1820. p.54.

carriages and servants. To support this luxurious mode of living, they were often obliged to borrow from a monied native of rank who supplied "their extravagance, and encouraged their dissipation until their difficulties are almost inextricable".[1] The high interest rate soon doubled the original sum and "a man is thus obliged to pay the debt three or four times over".[2] Another gainful investment was the purchase of landed property. In 1793, the decennial settlement was declared permanent, and the landlords became the permanent owners of the land. In the early period of the next century, a great proportion of those who possessed the most valuable lands were new men who had purchased their estates at auction and thus replaced the old landlords. These new owners who often paid much less as annual revenue to the government than the amount they derived from their estate,[3] were more commercial in their dealings and less benevolent in their treatment than many of the old owners whom they replaced. Ownership of estates was also the most direct road to the realm of aristocracy to which many of the newly rich aspired. Some of them accumulated enormous fortunes, and the public apartments of a few were fitted up after

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1. *Ibid,* p.58.

2. Fanny Parks. *Wanderings of a pilgrim in search of the picturesque...* v.1 London, 1850. p.33.

3. "The descendants of Kanta Baboo (Mr. Hasting's dewan) own the estates of the Boruya which contain 470 sq. miles, yet they pay only 3,000 rupees per annum to the government". (see W. Hamilton. p.204).

the European fashion. Some had "taken to the drinking of tea", some kept English coaches and equipages, and "one in particular had an English coachman".[1]

While the old aristocrats dwelt upon their past glory and the new middle class took full advantage of the facilities created by the British rule, the common people, both the Hindus and the Muslims, lived in poverty and without proper education, and followed their religious traditions and the dictates of their religious leaders. Widely differing views have been expressed by contemporary Englishmen about the general character of the natives. Lord Cornwallis branded "every native of Hindustan" as corrupt,[2] and according to Macaulay, perjury and forgery formed an integral part of the Bengali character.[3] Bishop Heber referred to many of their vices arising from slavery, from an unsettled state of society, and an immoral and erroneous system of religion, but he concluded "... on the whole they are a lively, intelligent and interesting people".[4]

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1. *Geographical, Statistical, and historical description of Hindostan*... v.1, p.59.
Also ~~Fany~~ Fanny Parks writes in her *Wanderings of a pilgrim*...(p.30) "The house (of Rammohun) was very handsomely furnished, everything in European style, with the exception of the owner".

2. "... every native of Hindustan (I really believe) corrupt". See Charles Ross, (ed.) *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, v.1, 2nd ed. London, 1859. p.282.

3. Cited in R. C. Majumdar (ed.) *The history and culture of the Indian people*, v.10, pt.2. Bombay, 1965. p.23.

4. Reginald Heber. *Narrative of a journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, v.2. London, 1856, p.195.

Walter Hamilton thought that the Bengalees were in general, a lively, handsome race of men, mild by nature. Whenever in their behaviour, insolence, ill nature, coarseness, brutality were observed, "the change may be invariably traced to their intercourse with low Europeans".[1] Another cause for the degradation was the establishment of the Supreme Court. ". . . every native connected with which (Supreme Court) appearing to have his morals contaminated by the intimacy".[2] Maria Graham was appalled by the passive submission, the apathy, and the degrading superstitions of the Hindus, but she has also placed on the same level the fanaticism of the Muslims and the ignorance and the vulgarity of most of the white people.[3] But whatever might be the cause, there is no doubt that the moral character and cultural life of the Bengalis reached a very low level. The priests and the mullahs dominated and dictated the religious life of the people, and the caste-ridden Hindu society was infested with many evil practices such as *satī*, female infanticide, human sacrifice and kulinism.

The impact of western culture was felt in Bengal earlier and more vividly than any other part of India. This stirring was most marked in the capital Calcutta - the centre of administration,

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1. *Geographical, statistical, and historical description of Hindostan*... v.1. p.60.

2. *Ibid*. In 1831 Rammohun in his statement before the Select Committee of the House of Commons gave a similar opinion. See K. Nag and D. Burman (ed.). *The English works of Raja Rammohun Roy*. pt.3. Calcutta, 1947. p.64.

3. Maria Graham. *Journal of a residence in India*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh 1813. p.134.

trade, and commerce. The city was peopled by inhabitants from almost every part of the world - Chinese and Frenchmen, Persians and Germans, Arabs and Spaniards, Armenians and Portuguese, Jews and Dutchmen, in addition to the Indians and the British, the original inhabitants and the actual rulers of the country. The characters of the people were various and their dress, manners, etc., formed "the most motley picture that can be imagined".[1] On the streets could be seen at once Europeans in elegant carriages drawn by fine horses, children in carriages drawn by bullocks, and natives "in old tattered coaches or indescribable carts, made with bamboos, covered with red curtains, and drawn by horses which can scarcely stand upright".[2] On foot, there were people of different nations with their respective national dresses, and all speaking the languages of their own countries. It was in Calcutta that the effect of intercourse between Europeans and natives was visible in any degree. Maria Graham thought that this mixture of nations weakened national characteristics but she also observed that among the English at least "the effect seems diametrically opposite. Every Briton appears to pride himself on being outrageously a John Bull".[3]

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1. William Carey's letter to his sisters, dated 2 Dec. 1802. In Eustace Carey. *Memoir of William Carey*, London, 1836 p.460.
2. *ibid.*
3. *Journal of a residence in India*, p.139

This John Bull attitude of the British which was absent during the earlier period, appeared when the position of the East India Company changed towards the middle of the 18th century, and towards the end, the British were becoming conscious of a sense of racial superiority. The factors which contributed to this change were many - the growing number of men and women in the British settlement, the increasing contact and knowledge of Indian life and the increasing contempt of everything Indian, the influence of Christian missionaries who had nothing but horror for the religion of the natives, etc. There were few Englishmen who did try to bridge the gulf between themselves and Indians, but they were the exceptions. As the century drew to its close, a superiority complex was found among the British which regarded India "not only as a country whose institutions were bad and people corrupted, but one which was by its nature incapable of ever becoming any better".[1]

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1. Percival Spear. *The Nabobs*. London, 1963. p.136.

Religion

Hinduism

Although old traditions and institutions had since long dominated the religious scene in Bengali society, a significant process of change and transformation can be noticed beneath the surface. The spirit of criticism in the old Bengali *Bauddhagāna* and *Dohā*[1] in the 12-13th century against the Brahamanical socio-religious rites and rituals, and the hostile attitude of the followers of local cults expressed in some liturgical texts of the Dharmites[2] indicate that Brahmanical orthodoxy was even then at a disfavour with those adhering to indigenous cults. As a counter-measure, the Brahmanical socio-religious code was tightened,

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1. In the *Dohākosha*, Saraha-pāda (also known as Saroja-Vajra) writes:

   "airiehim uddulia cchāre/sīsasu vāhia e jaddabhārem
   gharahī vaisī dīvā jālī/konahim vaisī ghandā cālī
   akkhi nivesī āsana vandhī/kannehim khusukhusāi jana dhandhī"

   (The devotees of Isvara with their whole body covered with ashes and matted hair on their heads, go in the house, sit in a corner, light lamps, and ring bells. They make yogic postures. With blinking eyes they whisper mantras into the ears of the people and deceive them thoroughly).

   See Haraprasāda Sāstrī. *Hāzāra bacharera purāna bāngālā bhāshāya bouddhagāna o dohā*, ~~sampādaka~~. Kalikātā, 1336. p.86-87.

2. See Shashibhusan Dasgupta. *The obscure religious cults*. Calcutta 1962. Chap.X.

and the *smrti* literature which bears eloquent testimony of such reaction seems to have stopped contacts between the higher and lower classes of Hindu society. This lack of communication between the two classes resulted on the one hand in the isolation of Brahmanism, and on the other in considerable freedom for the lower class to express their ideas and beliefs, which gave rise to a large number of cults - Manasā, Candī, Gorakhnāth, Satyapir, etc. - and myriads of gods, goddesses and demigods.[1] The cult of Bhakti took a definite shape in Bengal. In the *Gītāgovinda* of Jayadeva, Rādhā appears for the first time as the fully established lady-love of Kṛṣṇa. The verses of Vidyāpati and Candidāsa made the cult of Rādhākṛṣṇa quite popular, and Caitanya (1486-1534) "who is believed to have realized in his own self both the Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa aspects of the Reality"[2] gave a tremendous impetus to Vaishnavism in Bengal and Orissa, and the cult of Bhakti in general. But the cults of Śiva and Viṣṇu with many of their sub-cults[3] dominated the religious field. The worship of the mother-goddess, Dūrgā, Kālī, Tārā, and Manasā was very popular. The goddess Kālī of Kalighat had many devotees, some of whom would spend fabulous sums of money for the

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1. "A little red paint smeared over a stone, a lump of clay, or a stump of a tree, converts it into a god, worshipped by the lower classes, and saluted by the upper with much apparent devotion". (*A Geographical statistical, and historical description of Hindostan.* Introd. p. XXV.)

2. Montazur Rahman Tarafdar. *Husain Shahi Bengal.* Dacca, 1965. p.20.

3. For detailed study of various sects see H. H. Wilson. *A Sketch of the religious sects of the Hindus.* Originally published in the *Asiatic Researches* vols.16-17 (1828-32).

gluttonous pleasure and material prosperity of the deity.[1] The absence of the scriptures from the reach of the common people gave rise to "popular Hinduism" with undue influence of the priesthood and its consequent emphasis on rituals and ceremonies.

But in contrast to the multiplicity of sects and their narrow sectarianism which grew up in Bengal and elsewhere, a liberal tradition was also current in Indian society. This was the tradition of Rāmānanda, Kabīr, Dādu and Nānak. They questioned the validity of excessive ceremonialism and meaningless formalism, ridiculed the dictates of the priests, denounced polytheism, and advocated that simple and pure devotion was the only way to God.[2] Some of their social and religious ideas were quite modern even by present standards, and were similar to what Rammohun believed and fought for, e.g. (a) God is One - formless, infinite, eternal and omnipresent; (b) Idolatry is nothing but an insult to God; (c) Caste system is meaningless; (d) Women should not be kept in

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1. "About twenty years ago Juyu-Narayunu-Ghoshalu, of Kiddurpooru, near Calcutta, expended 25,000 roopees at this place when he sacrificed twenty-five buffaloes, one hundred and eight goats, and five sheep; and presented to the goddess four silver arms, two gold eyes, and many gold and silver ornaments". W. Ward. *(A view of the history, literature and religion of the Hindoos.* Vl. 3rd ed. London, 1817, p.161).

2. Kabīr, (15th cent.) says -

   "tirth kari kari jag muvā dumghai pāmni nhai
   rāmmahi rāmm japamtadām kāl ghasityam jāi

   (Roaming about pilgrimage and bathing in sacred rivers are futile as long as the mind is not purified through the love of God). See Syāmasundara Dāsa,(ed.) *Kabīra granthavali*, 9th ed. Vārānasī, 2021 samvat. p.26

pardah; (e) Men and women should have the same rights in the practice of religion, etc.[1]

Islam

The social and religious life of the Muslim population in Bengal was profoundly influenced by Hinduism. Many local customs and manners and certain beliefs, rites, and ceremonies of the Hindus were incorporated in their faith, and centuries of contact between the two communities had given rise to a popular religion which was not very consistent with the teaching of Islam. The Sufis took into their mystic practices some of the tantric and yogic ideas of the Hindus and many Muslim writers of the time attempted a cultural synthesis.[2] The worship of the saints (*pīra*) who resembled the gurus of the Hindus was prevalent. Various mystic cults and legends grew up around the saints, and some of them were very popular among both the Muslims and the Hindus.[3] One reason for the non-observance of rigid Islamic laws

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Nānak (1469-1538), the founder of Sikhism also criticised the orthodox sects of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities. See *Obscure religious cults*, p.354.

1. Kshitimohana Sena. *Yugaguru Rāmamohana*. Article in *Visvabhāratī Patrikā*, v.10, 1358. p.33.

2. Saiyid Sultan in his *Navi vaṃsha* does not find any difference between an *avatāra* (incarnation) and a *nabi* (prophet). He considers Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesvara, Kṛishṇa and Muhammad are all incarnations of God.

3. e.g. The Dharmite cult. (See the *Obscure religious cults*. Chapter X.

by the Muslim population in Bengal is perhaps the fact that the Arabic scriptures had never been translated into Bengali, and thus the knowledge of the religion was not easily available to the masses.

Nineteenth century Bengal witnessed a Muslim revivalist movement known as *Faraiz* which advocated performance of obligatory duties enjoined in the *Qurān* and a firm belief in the unity of God (*tauhid*). All popular Islamic rites and ceremonies, e.g. saint worship, etc., were denounced. But the reformation movement did not succeed "in wiping out the vestiges of un-Islamic practices and beliefs which had become traditional among large numbers of Muslims".[1]

Christianity

In November 1873, William Carey arrived in India, and with him a new era of Christian missionary work started. After 1813, when missionaries were freely licensed to go to India and when an Anglican hierarchy of bishops and archdeacons for India were established, the number of Christian missionaries increased tremendously. From the arrival of Carey till 1833 eight Christian missionary societies worked in Bengal. Their main activities were

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1. Narendra Krishna Sinha, (ed.). *The history of Bengal (1757-1905)*, Calcutta, 1967. p.588.

to spread the message of the Bible and to convert the people to Christianity. They adopted three methods - preaching, translation of the Gospel, and education.[1] The general feelings of the missionaries were a firm belief in the superiority of their own religion and a sense of pity for the Indian religions particularly ~~to~~ for Hinduism. Bishop Heber also felt this pity. On his way to Calcutta from Diamond Harbour in 1823, he was very much impressed by "the exotic appearance of the plants and the people", but when he thought of his mission he felt sorry for the natives. ". . . the amiable manners and countenances of the people, contrasted with the symbols of their foolish and polluted idolatry now first before me, impressed me with a very solemn and earnest wish that I might in some degree, however small, be enabled to conduce to the spiritual advantage of creatures, so goodly, so gentle, and now so misled and blinded".[2] Claudius Buchanan, the Chaplain of the East India Company, who was horrified by Indian religious practices and social institutions, proposed the division of history into three eras - (a) the era of primitive Christianity, (b) the era of reformation, and (c) the era of light, the present time,

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1. K. P. Sen Gupta. *The results of the Christian missionary activities in Bengal (1793-1833).* Article in *Bengal Past & Present*, v.89, Jan-June 1970. p.74.

2. *Narrative of a journey through the upper provinces of India.* Vol. 1. London, 1861. p.25.

which would culminate in the triumph of Christianity. As far as India was concerned, this doctrine meant that the land surely would become Christian and would need the work of the Christian missionaries.[1] Some of the prevalent Hindu practices which disturbed the missionaries were (a) idolatry, superstition, and indecent ceremonies, (b) pilgrimage to Juggernath and some abnormal practices there, (c) the prevalence of female infanticide, (d) the condition of women, (e) the horrors of *satī*, (f) the existence of slavery, and (g) the evils of the caste system. The horror for these prevalent social and religious practices of the Hindus plus a sense of British superiority in religious, social and intellectual life perhaps prompted Wilberforce to a hasty generalisation - "Our religion is sublime, pure and beneficent. Theirs is mean, licentious, and cruel".[2] William Carey's programme of action was first to communicate with the Indians through their own languages, to show them the evils of their

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1. *The Eras of Light*, sermon by Claudius Buchanan on 1 July 1810. *Cited* in George D. Bearce. *British attitude towards India (1754-1858)*. London, 1961. p.80.

2. *Hansard*. v.26, ~~831-72~~ 865, 22 June 1813.

society and religion,[1] and finally to convert them to Christianity.

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1. One typical example of such efforts is a booklet of 8 pages written in Bengali by a missionary and published in Serampur probably in 1820, (*Kon śāstra mānanīya*? by Henry Townney, Missionary, Serampur, 1820?). In a dialogue between Mark, a Christian, and Ramachandra, a Hindu who is perplexed by a Pandit's threat that he should suffer in hell if he favours Christianity, and Mark's assertion that he would, no doubt, suffer the same fate if he does not, Mark produces nine proofs (out of many more) to show why the Bible is superior to the scriptures of the Hindus: (1) The Bible is published in all the languages of the world and is open to all. It is not hidden like the Hindu scriptures. It is well known that a good coin circulates easily while a bad coin does not. (2) The majority of the people of the world have accepted the Bible as their scripture. (3) Like the sun the Bible gives light to everybody, while like a little lamp the Hindu scriptures give light to a very limited few. (4) God's deeds as mentioned in the Bible, are all noble and they are devoid of any sin. Brahma, in the Hindu scriptures, attempted union with his own daughter, and Krishna killed a washerman to steal clothes. (5) Worship of God is holy according to the Bible, but many filthy songs are part of Hindu worship. (6) The commandments in the Bible are unblemished while many of the commandments in the Hindu scriptures are false. (7) The Christian heaven is a holy place. In the Hindu heaven there are not only lust, anger, jealousy, etc. but also many misdeeds with the nymphs. (8) The son of Man sacrificed himself for the sin of mankind. Atonement has a special significance to the Christians. The Hindus do not understand this special significance. To them it is something like repaying debt. (9) Believers in the Bible enjoy happiness not only in the other world but also in this world. Many Hindus, on the other hand, suffer physical discomforts even in this world, for their faith in ascetic practices and queer postures of meditation.

Thought

The Indian rationalistic tradition

Both reason and authority play an important role in Indian thought. A difference of opinion about the capabilities of human experience gave rise to two trends of thought. One holds that philosophy should be based on ordinary normal experience of human beings.[1] On the other hand there are thinkers who believe that the range of human experience is limited, it cannot help us to form any correct idea regarding matters such as God, the state of liberation, etc. So in such cases we must depend upon the experience of those few saints, seers, or prophets who have a direct realisation or perception (*darśana*) of such things. Thus according to them, the authority of the scriptures and the testimony of the seers form the basis of philosophy.[2] But though the fundamental principles used by these two schools of thought are different, both of them rely on reason as their chief instrument of speculation. According to one, reasoning should always follow the lead of ordinary experience, according to the other, reasoning should follow in some matters the lead of authority as well.[3]

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1. "This view is accepted by the Nyāya, the Vaiśeṣika, the Sāṅkhya, and the Cārvāka schools. Bauddha and Jaina schools also accepted it mostly." S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Datta. *An introduction to Indian philosophy*. Calcutta, 1954. p.8.

2. The Mimāṃsā schools (both the Purva and the Uttara, i.e. Vedānta) follow this method. The Bauddha and the Jaina schools sometimes depend on the teachings of the Buddha and the Jinas.

3. *An introduction to Indian philosophy*, p.8.

Three of the greatest philosophers in India - Nāgārjuna,(2nd. cent. A.D.), Gauḍapāda (6th cent. A.D.) and Śaṅkara (9th cent. A.D.) belong to this later tradition. All of them believed in authority - the first one in the teachings of the Buddha, the last two in the *Upanishads*, and each of them built up a strong rationalistic school.

Both Nāgārjuna and Gauḍapāda appeal to reason as well as to their own traditional teaching (*āgama*) for support of their systems. But there is a difference. For Nāgārjuna it is reason first and then *āgama*, for Gauḍapāda it is *āgama* first and reason next. Śaṅkara insists that the *Brahman* can be realised through reason as well as *āgama*. Critical reason reigns supreme in Nāgārjuna's system. He has a dialectic (*prasaṅga*) which amounts to a criticism and final banishment of all prevailing theories of his times. Gauḍapāda, on the other hand, is anxious to follow the *śruti* (scriptures) very closely, for they are, as he thinks, the one unimpeachable source of Vedāntic thought. To his mind they could contain nothing that is incompatible with reason. He therefore, makes the use of reason in accordance with the suggestion of the *śruti*. Śaṅkara disregarded the use of pure reason for its own sake in matters of metaphysical importance. *Śruti*, according to him, does not arbitrarily impose itself as an authority on the enquirer, but proposes to lead him to the highest truth by means of reasoning based on facts of experience. "It should be noted", he says "that no dry reasoning without experience to support it

can be allowed in this argument. It is, only that reasoning which is suggested by the *śruti* itself could be used as leading to direct realisation".[1]

Freedom of thought in Islam

In the 9th century A.D. Islamic civilization, its theology, philosophy and science came deeply under Hellenistic influence. The earliest theological controversies which were instigated by such contact, centered around the question of human free will versus God's predestination, and of the nature of God's unity - whether his attributes were eternal entities besides his essence. Those who championed the freedom and efficacy of the human will were accused as heretics. After the Omayyads the free-will idea gained ground resulting in the rise of the Mu'tazilite school. They denied the attributes of God over and above his essence. Above all they believed in the autonomy of reason over revelation and in the supremacy of reasoned (*'aqli*) faith over the traditional (*naqli*). But can man by his own reason discover religious truths? To this question the Mutazilis would answer that he must. Is it not the teaching of the *Qur'ān* to turn our eyes to heaven

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1. nānena misena śuṣkatarkasyātrātmalābhaḥ sambhavati śrutyanugṛhīta eva hyatra tarkonubhavāṅgatvenaśrīyate" *(Brahmasūtra, Śāṅkarabhāsya* 2.1.6). Rammohun's view on the relation between human reason and the scriptures was similar to that of Śankara.

and earth, and to apply our minds to things?[1] Thus it gives lie to those who wish only to stand by the beliefs of their fathers. And when it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has revealed', they say: 'Nay, we follow that wherein we found our fathers. What! Even though their fathers had no sense at all, nor did they follow the right way".[2]

The Mutazilis maintained that all the attributes of God, both physical (i.e. hearing, sight, speech, strength and power) and mental (i.e. knowledge, will etc.), should be submitted to the interpretative process supplied by reason, and none could be understood in their surface meaning. They did not believe in the Traditions, or the *Sunnah*. They used only the *Qur'an*, and to explain it they had recourse to human reason rather than to tradition. They carried their conviction so far as to hold that where reason and tradition came into conflict, it was the former which had to be followed. They could not accept speech as an attribute of God, and consequently they declared the *Qur'an* as created and not eternal.

The Islamic philosophical movement was an outgrowth of the Mu'tazili scholasticism (*kalam*). The philosophers reinterpreted and elaborated the Mutazilite doctrine of the unity of God, and

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1. Maulana Muhammad Ali, (tr.) *The holy Qur'an*. 4th ed. Lahore, 1961 (The Elevated places. Ch.7:185) p.358.

2. *ibid*. (The Cow. Ch.2: 170). p.69-70.

according to the new doctrine God was represented as Pure Being without essence or attributes.

Natural religion of the deists and the advancement of science in Europe

In the 17th and the 18th centuries the deists, or the free-thinkers pointed out the inconsistencies, contradictions and absurdities in Christian theology and the moral difficulties of the creed, and in the 19th century the discoveries of science in many fields brought into question the accuracy of revelation and the authority of the sacred documents.

The deists advocated what was called natural religion - a belief in a wise God who created the world and the natural laws, and desires our happiness. According to them the God of the natural religion whose existence could be proved by reason, cannot be identified with the author of the Christian revelation; and the revealed doctrine of future rewards and punishments contains a great deal that is repugnant to moral ideas.[1] The deists built up their theory on rational grounds "we are not to renounce our senses, and experience; nor that which is the undoubted word of

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1. Shaftesbury argued that the scheme of heaven and hell, with hopes and fears which they inspire, corrupts morality. (See Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury. *An enquiry concerning virtue of merit.* Heidelberg, 1904, ed. by J. Riska).

God, our natural reason".[1] During the later part of the 18th century, when superstitious practices and religious persecutions were becoming a scandal in France, Voltaire assailed the Catholic Church in every field with ridicule and satire. In his *The Tomb of fanaticism* (originally published in 1767) he compares a man who accepts his religion without examining it, with an ox which allows itself to be harnessed.[2] As far as India of the 19th century is concerned, perhaps the most influential writer was the English deist Thomas Paine (18th century). An admirer of the American constitution and a supporter of the French Revolution, Paine was outlawed for his *Rights of man* (first published in 1791). He soon committed a new offence by the publication of an anti-Christian work *The Age of reason*[3] in 1794. He regarded nature as God's revelation. "That which is now called natural philosophy, embracing the whole circle of science . . . is the study of the

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1. Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan, or the matter, forme and power of a commonwealth, ecclesiastical and civil.* New York, 1962. p.271.

2. See J. B. Bury. *A history of freedom of thought.* London, 1949. p.154.

3. "... Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* for a copy of which eight rupees was offered by some of the pupils (of the Hindu College) - *Calcutta Christian Observer*, Aug. 1832". Quoted in Bimanbehari Majumdar, *History of Indian social and political ideas.* Calcutta, 1967. p.302. (The original price was Rupee one. The book was translated into Bengali afterwards.)

works of God, and of the power and wisdom of God in his works, and is the true theology".[1]

Modern science was gradually establishing itself since the 17th century. The demonstration of the Copernican theory, the discovery of gravitation, the discovery of the circulation of blood, and the foundation of modern chemistry and physics made the presence of science felt in the authoritative domain of the Church. The true nature of the comets was ascertained and they ceased to be regarded as signs of heavenly wrath. At the beginning of the 19th century Laplace worked out the mechanics of the universe. Geology shook the infallibility of the Bible, but "left the creation of some prehistoric Adam and Eve, a still admissible hypothesis. Here, however, Zoology stepped in, and pronounced upon the origin of man".[2]

The achievements of science shook the traditional world. The news of its discoveries reached Bengal through newspapers and western literature and changed the thinking pattern of progressive men in India.

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1. Thomas Paine. *Age of reason,* in the *Basic writings of Thomas Paine.* New York, 1942. p.46.

2. *A history of freedom of thought.* p.179.

CHAPTER II

RAMMOHUN : THE MAN AND THE REFORMER

When Rammohun appeared on the stage of Indian history the Mughal empire had contracted into the shadows under the blows of foreign invaders and domestic ambitions. But the Mughal emperor "still exercised a peculiar fascination over the minds of men who were destroying his empire".[1] And for the vacant seat of the Mughal, poised upon the edge of the empire two dominant powers aspired, the British and the Marathas. After the battle of Plassey fifteen years earlier in 1757, the British had established themselves in Bengal and in spite of the prevailing chaos, the shape of a new order of things was emerging slowly. In 1772, the year Rammohun was born,[2] Warren Hastings became Governor-General of Bengal, and under his administration there was a growing interest in the language, literature and tradition of the Hindus. The translation of the Sanskrit classics had a great effect upon some European scholars. The *Bhagavadgītā*, translated by Charles Wilkins in 1785, and Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānsākuntalam* by Sir William Jones in 1790, deeply influenced Schlegel, Schopenhauer, and Goethe. This

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1. Michael Edwards. *Glorious Sahibs*. London, 1968. p.19.

2. The date of his birth is controversial. See R.C. Majumdar. *On Rammohan Roy*. Calcutta, 1972. Lecture I - The date of the birth of Raja Rammohan Roy.

interest of foreign scholars made the Hindus conscious of their own heritage and encouraged them to re-examine and to re-value their own beliefs against the pretensions of Western science and culture.

Two distinct periods mark two distinct characteristics in Rammohun's life. In the first period which terminated in the first half of 1815, he as the member of a middle class family, tried like others, to establish himself in society, and finally, unlike many others, he succeeded. In the second period which begins in the middle of 1815 when he permanently settled down in Calcutta, and which ends in his death at Bristol in 1833, he was a dominant public figure and a reformer.

Rammohun inherited from his father a love for material prosperity and the shrewdness needed to acquire and maintain that prosperity.[1] From his mother he inherited a strong sense of self-respect, a spirit of independence, and a dedication to one's own convictions.[2] His association with the Sadar Dewani Adalat and his involvement with litigations, acquainted him with intricacies of law and with many unethical practices of the law courts, but they also helped him to acquire a clear, logical mind and an understanding

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1. Father Rāmakānta used to teach his children about matters concerning land and revenue since they were quite young. See Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay. *Rāmamohana Rāya*, 5th ed. Calcutta, 1960. p.14 (Sāhitya-sādhaka caritamālā, v.1, no.16).

2. *ibid*, p.13.

of human nature. From 1796 when he got the share of his father's estate,[1] Rammohun was an independent man. He devoted himself to building up his fortune. He bought landed properties which yielded him a decent annual income,[2] he was engaged in the money-lending business,[3] he acted as a broker of Company's papers,[4] and he served under Thomas Woodforde and John Digby - two civilian officers of the East India Company, as dewan - a high and lucrative post for a native. When his father was in financial difficulties and was sent to prison due to the non-payment of revenues,[5] he, it seems, dissociated himself from the whole affair. His relation with his mother ~~was~~ were also anything but happy.

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1. "He divided the bulk of his immoveable property among his three sons by a deed of partition executed on the 1st December 1796 (19 Agrahayana, 1203)". See Ramaprasad Chand and Jatindra Kumar Majumdar, (ed.). *Selections from official letters and documents relating to the life of Raja Rammohun Roy*, v.1, Calcutta, 1938. Introductory memoir, p.xxii.

2. In 1799 he purchased two taluks Govindapur and Ramesvarpur, and four more some years after. All these taluks jointly yielded him an approximate profit of Rs.12,000. See *Rāmamohana Rāya*, p.19; *Selections from official letters and documents*, p.xxxv, and xxxix.

3. "So it seems that Rammohun Roy may have been carrying on money-lending business in Calcutta even before he received a share of his father's immovable property". *Selections from official letters*, p.xxxiv.

   In 1797, he lent Andrew Ramsey (a civilian of the Company) Rs.7,500. See *Rāmamohana Rāya*, p.18.

   In 1802, he lent Rs.5,000 to Mr. Thomas Woodforde of the Civil Service. See *Selections from official letters and documents*, p.xxxvi; *Rāmamohana Rāya*, p.21.

4. "Rammohun Roy also 'employed himself in dealing with Company's papers' ... or buy Company's papers in his own name." *Selections from official letters and documents*, p.xxxvii.

5. In 1801, his brother Jagamohun also met the same fate. See *Rāmamohana Rāya*, p.20.

In 1815 Rammohun settled down in Calcutta. By now he had amassed a fortune. He bought two houses and lived in a sumptuous style as it befitted his position and ambition. He took prominent part in all public activities. Fanny Parkes wrote - "The other evening we went to a party given by Ramohun Roy, a rich Bengallee baboo; the grounds, which are extensive, were well illuminated, and excellent fireworks displayed . . . The house was very handsomely furnished, everything in European style, with the exception of the owner".[1] By now he had also acquired a profound scholarship. Lieut-Col. Fitzclarence (afterwards Earl of Munster) who met him sometime in 1817-18, was much impressed by his knowledge in different fields.[2] This scholarship combined with his knowledge of different religions, his understanding of the Indian social system, his acquaintance with Western ideas, his intention to gain some political,

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1. *Wanderings of a pilgrim,* p.29-30.

2. "I became well acquainted with him, and admired his talents and acquirements. His eloquence in our language is very great, and I am told he is still more admirable in Arabic and Persian. It is remarkable that he has studied and thoroughly understands the politics of Europe, but more particularly those of England; and the last time I was in his company he argued forcible against a standing army in a free country, and quoted all the arguments brought forward by the Members of the Opposition . . . His learning is most extensive, as he is not only conversant with the best books in English, Arabic, Sanskrit, Bengalee and Hindusthani, but has even rhetoric in Arabic and English, and quoted Locke and Bacon on all occasions". *(Journal of a route across India through Egypt to England in the years 1817 and 1818).* Quoted in S.C. Chakravarty, (ed.) *The Father of modern India: commemoration volume of the Rammohun Roy Centenary Celebrations, 1933.* Calcutta, 1935. p.161.

economic and social advantages for the people (particularly the elite middle class), and above all his leisurely life resulting from his financial security, prompted him to devote his energies to the work of reform. He realised that the different fields of activities in human life, social, political, economic and religious, are interdependent, and that to improve any one it needed a general improvement of all. First of all he decided to deal with religion. But though he spent much of his time to reform Hinduism, and though he is better known as a religious reformer, religion was only a secondary item in his programme of reformation.[1]

His acquaintance with the major religions and his understanding, treatment and interpretation of different faiths helped him to comprehend the nature and pattern of religion, its role in society, its civilizing effects, and the deceptions and corruptions which it might give rise to. In the 18th century the religion of the Hindus had degenerated, and Hinduism, with its multitude of sects and varieties of rites and rituals which created fragmentation and brought disunity, faced a crisis. The long absence of the Hindu scriptures from the

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1. "I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interest . . . It is, I think, necessary that some change should take place in their religion, at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort". (Rammohun's letter to John Digby dated 18 January 1828). In *The English works* pt.iv. Calcutta, 1947. p.95-96.

life of the people gave rise to many evil practices which were based on misguided beliefs and false interpretation by the ignorant priests.[1] Rammohun brought the scriptures[2] to the reach of the ~~common people~~ non-Brahmins, and interpreted them according to his own religious ideas which he had formed by now.

Rammohun's religious reform had a twofold purpose - (a) to demonstrate to the believers of other religions and to the ruling class both in India and abroad that contrary to the horrible picture painted by the Christian missionaries, the scriptures of the Hindus did not advocate polytheism, idolatry or miracles, but that in fact their message was lofty, rational and elevating; and (b) to remind the Hindus that many of the rites and rituals which they were practising as religion were not only evil in nature and derogatory but also had no sanction in their own scriptures. The method he adopted to make them conscious of the teachings of their scriptures and to propagate his own ideas on religion, was mainly (a) discussion and (b) publication and distribution of literature.[3]

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1. "Lokete Vedāntaśāstrera aprācurya nimitta svārthapara paṇḍita sakalera bākyaprabandhe . . . aneka subodha loko ei kalpanāte magna āchena" *Vedānta grantha, bhūmikā*, p.4. In *Rāmamohana granthāvali*.

2. i.e. *Upanishad* part of the scriptures.

3. "I, therefore, . . . not only employed verbal arguments against the absurdities of the idolatry practised by them, but also translated their most revered theological works, namely Vedant, into Bengali, and Hindust~~h~~ani and also several chapters of Ved, in order to convince them that the unity of God, and absurdities of idolatry, are evidently pointed out by their own scriptures". (Rammohun's letter to John Digby). In *The English works* Pt.4, p.95.

CHAPTER III

A SURVEY OF HIS WRITINGS ON RELIGION

Tuhfat'ul mwāhhidin

In 1803/4 Rammohun published his *Tuhfat'ul mwāhhidin* in Persian with an Arabic preface. Though small in size (14 pages) it contains the thoughts on religion of a well-informed and mature mind. The general argument of this treatise is as follows. He classified mankind into four categories according to their religious convictions: (a) deceivers who wilfully invent doctrines of creed and faith; (b) deceived who put their faith in such doctrines; (c) those who are both deceivers and deceived; and (d) those who are neither deceivers nor deceived. Mankind, by nature, believes in "One being who is the source of creation and the governor of it".[1] His presence could be known "simply by keen insight into and deep observation of the mysteries of nature".[2] In society, sectarian leaders have invented several dogmas of faith and "have declared them in the form of truth by pretending some supernatural acts or by the force of their tongue".[3] As a result various religious sects grow up, and each sect of mankind is devoted to some peculiar forms of worship or

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1. Obaidullah el Obaide, (tr.) *Tuhfatu'l mwāhhidin.* Calcutta, 1884. Introd.
2. *ibid,* p.7
3. *ibid,* p.1.

devotion to a god or gods. This sectarian inclination "is an excrescent quality grown in mankind by habit and training"[1] in contrast to their original nature. To justify their own faith and to establish its credibility, each sect tries to vilify the beliefs of the other sects. Such action of each can only prove that "falsehood is common to all religions".[2] Rammohun denounces miracles and supernatural events, and emphasises the importance of reason. Reason, according to him, is an innate faculty in man by which he can solve the mysteries of nature, and is able to know that "there exists a Being who governs the whole universe".[3]

The *Tuhfat* was written not against any particular religion but against the corruption of religion in general. The text evidences a good knowledge of all the principal religions. Otherwise how could he comment on them and could come to such a mature conclusion?[4] As at that time his knowledge of English was still poor,[5] it is improbable

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1. *ibid,* Introd.

2. *ibid,* Introd.

3. *ibid,* p.7.

4. "It is really surprising how the Raja could write a book like the *Tuhfat* at this period". Kalidas Nag's Preface to the Bengali tr. of *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin.* Calcutta, 1949 p.2.

5. In 1801 Rammohun "could merely speak it well enough to be understood". John Digby's preface to Rammohun's English tr. of *The Kena Upanishad and the abridgement of the Vedanta.* London, 1817. (Quoted in S.D. Collet. *The Life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy.* Calcutta, 1962. p.24).

that his ideas were much influenced by western sources. It seems that in writing the *Tuhfat* Rammohun was influenced by some literature on religion written in Arabic, Persian or Sanskrit. Two well known treatises on religion popular during the period were Shahrastani's *Kitāb al-milāl wa'l-nihāl* (Book of religious and philosophical sects) in Arabic, and *Dabistān mazāhib* (School of religions) in Persian. The *Dabistān* seems to be the more probable source.

Around the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, the *Dabistān* was the 'talk of the town' among Indologists. The whole of the 18th century can be termed as the period of 'Oriental treasure hunting'. In 1718 George Boucher discovered a copy of the *Vendidād Sadah*, and in 1771 Anquetil Duperron published his first European translation of the *Avestā*. In Calcutta, the Asiatic Society was formed in 1784 as the "means of centralizing all the valuable knowledge which might occasionally be attained",[1] and of preserving the many little tracts and essays of the country, "every part of which abounds in objects of curious and useful speculation".[2] Sir William Jones was the first who drew the attention of orientalists to the *Dabistān*. ". . . a fortunate discovery", he said, "a rare and interesting tract on twelve different religions".[3] Since then the *Dabistān* has been edited and translated by different scholars. The full English translation by David Shea and Anthony Troyer was published

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1. *Asiatic Researches*, v.1. 5th ed. London, 1806. Introd.

2. *ibid.*

3. *The Sixth discourse on the Persians*, delivered on 19 Feb. 1789. In *The Works of Sir William Jones, with the life of the author by Lord Teignmouth*. v.3. London, 1807. p.110.

in 1843. The *Dabistān* was quite familiar to native scholars: there were several manuscript copies of it in the country. The Calcutta edition - edited by Moulavi Nazr Ashraf and printed in 1809 - was the result of a collation of several manuscript copies, two or three of which "were in the possession of natives in Calcutta".[1] Anthony Troyer, the translator who knew Rammohun personally,[2] got his copy from the library of the Nawab of Oudh.

Did Rammohun know of the existence of the *Dabistān*? It is almost certain that he did. He was, as we know, a scholar in Persian, and he had many natives and European acquaintances who were scholars in that language. Since 1801, he was closely connected with the College of Fort William and the Sadar Dewani Adalat in Calcutta.[3] In the College, Francis Gladwin was in the Persian Department. He translated the first chapter of the *Dabistān* in 1789. Rammohun would have known of him and his work, and he would also have known Maulavi Nazr Ashraf of the Sadar Dewani Adalat, who was the editor of the first printed edition of the *Dabistān*.

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1. David Shea, and Anthony Troyer (tr.). *The Dabistan, or School of manners.* v.1. Paris, 1843. Preliminary discourse, p.189.

2. *ibid.* p.118. While talking about Abbé Dubois' *Hindu manners, customs and ceremonies,* Troyer wrote ". . . to which I am happy to add the most decisive judgement of the honourably-known Brahman, Ram Mohan Roy, whom I often heard say: "The European who best knew Hindus, and gave the most faithful account of them, was Abbé Dubois".

3. *Rāmamohana Rāya,* p.51.

The *Dabistān mazāhib* was composed in the year of the Hijra 1055 (A.D. 1645). The authorship is doubtful. By a wrong interpretation, it was attributed to a Muslim traveller named Mohsin Fani. The *Ma'asir ul-umarā* of Shah Nawaz Khan gives his name as Zulfikar Ardistani.[1] This was confirmed by William Erskine in a paper which he read in May 1819.[2]

The *Dabistān* is a large treatise, divided into twelve *tā'lim* or sections, each dealing with a religion; the religion of the Persians, the Hindus, the Tibetans, the Jews, the Christians, the Mussulmans, the Sadakiahs, the Unitarians, the Roshenians, the followers of Ilahi, the Philosophers, and the Sufis. The author exhibits the notions, dogmas, customs, and ceremonies of those twelve religions and their various sects. "The very first principle of all religion is referred, by some, to a primitive Divine revelation; by others, to a natural propensity of the human mind to superstition".[3] The author tries to be objective in his treatment of the subject. Only at the end of the book do we find his brief comment: "It is known that there are five great religions, viz., that of the Hindus,

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1. Samsamud-dowla Shah Nawaz Khan. *Ma'asir ul-Umarā.* Calcutta, 1888-1895. v.2. p.393.

2. *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay.* v.2. London, 1830. p.395. (Erskine gives the name as Zulfikar Ali at-Husaini).

3. *The Dabistān.* (English tr.) v.1. Preliminary discourse, p.66.

Jews, Magians, Nazarenes, and Musulmans. Each of these five proffer claims that their law is the true one, and set forth demonstrations for the confirmation of its truth".[1]

The section on the Ilahi faith of Emperor Akbar, seems to be a chapter on comparative religion. Here we see an assembly of learned men some of whom are the advocates of the five major religions. A philosopher of the Ilahi faith opens the discussion. He nullifies the divine mission of the prophets and laughs at their claim of performing miracles. If what the prophets say, does not conform to reason, they are then nothing but deceivers. He points out the absurdities and faults in all the five major religions, and emphasises that mankind's greatest possession is their faculty of reason which "renders it evident that the world has a Creator, all-mighty and all-wise".[2]

Many of the ideas of the Ilahi faith about god, prophets, miracles etc., are expressed in the *Tuhfat*. Like the philosopher of the Ilahi faith, Rammohun also appeals to reason, denounces miracles, and even echoes the philosopher's view about the birth of Jesus: ". . . birth of children without parents, is quite contrary to reason"[3]

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1. *ibid.* v.3. p.312.

2. *The Dabistān* (Eng. tr.) v.3. p.75

3. *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* (Eng. tr.) p.13. "wilādat afrād anwā hiwānāt az ābā wa ummahāt khās amr mahsūs ast wa taulīd bilā wasā'il muta'ārif amrī ast ki 'aql az qabūl ān farsanghā mī gurezid". *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* (Persian). Calcutta, 1950. p.8-9. See also *The Dabistān* (Eng. tr.) v.3, p.711 - "You yourselves say that Joseph, the carpenter, had taken Mary to wife; how can it be made out that Jesus was not the son of Joseph?"

About God he says that each individual of mankind has an innate faculty in him by which he can infer that "there exists a Being who (with his wisdom) governs the whole universe".[1] But the leaders of religion have invented several dogmas of faith for the sake of perpetuating their names and gaining honour. They declare these dogmas as true by the force of their tongue and with the help of some supernatural acts and thus deceive the people.[2] "Why should we" the philosopher asks in the *Dabistān*, "pay obedience to any person who belongs to mankind as ourselves, and who is subject to anger and lust, and avarice and passion, and love of rank and power, even more than ourselves?"[3] About supernatural events the philosopher says

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1. *ibid*, p.7. The complete sentence in the original Persian is thus - "Agar-chi har fard insānrā bi-dūn hidāyat wa talqīn digarī ba'd ihsās wa ta'ammul dar sar kaun wa fasād dar 'ālam wa auzā judāgāna dar baqāy anwā wa ta'īn zamān namuwī nabātāt mukhtalaf wa tashakhkhus kawākib sawābit wa saiyārat wa taqarrur shafaqat dar bawātin haiwānāt ba-hāl atfāl bilā chashm dāsht mu'āwazat wa inzibāt hālāt numū wa wuquf wa zubūl har yek az mawālid salāsa isti'dād rujū' 'alī jamāl ba-taraf zāt muntazim 'alam ast. *Tuhfatu'l muwāhhidin* (Persian) p.4. Obaidullah's translation:- "Although each individual of mankind, without instruction or guiding of any one, simply by keen insight into, and deep observation of, the mysteries of nature such as different modes of life fixed for different kinds of animals and vegetables and propagation of their species and the rules of the movements of the planets and stars and endowment of innate affection in animals towards their offsprings for nurturing them without having any object in exchange from them in future, and so forth, has an innate faculty in him by which he can infer that there exists a Being Who (with His wisdom) governs the whole universe".

2. *ibid*, p.1. "Ma'hazā aksarī az muqtadāyīān adyān judāgāna jihat ibqāy nām wa istizadh chand 'acā'id khās rā mauzū' wa bādī'āy kharq ādat bā baqūt lisānī". *Tuhfatu'l muwāhhidin* (Persian) p.1.

3. *The Dabistan* (Eng. tr.) v.3. p.75-76.

that they are "nothing else but one of the properties of several bodies, or a strange effect of the occult art".[1] Rammohun puts it more logically. Things of this world are mutually related to one another as cause and effect. But when for some reason the cause of a thing remains hidden to anyone, another person takes this opportunity and ascribes the event to his own supernatural power and exploits the ignorance of the common people.[2] The philosopher asserts that the knowledge of truth admits no contradiction, but he observes that different religions are contradictory to each other.[3] In his *Tuhfat* Rammohun says that some of the sectarians in pretending the truth of their own religion, confute the creed of others and thus they contradict each other. This contradiction only proves that "falsehood is common to all religions without distinction".[4] Lastly, according

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1. *ibid*, p.80.

2. "sar wājib al fikr dar īn bāb in ast ki dar in 'ālam asbāb wujūd har shai' mauqūf bar 'ilal zāhir wa sharā'it wa ma'dāt judāgāna ast hatta (ki) agar lihāz asbāb ba'īd wa qarib wa ma'dāt wa mawāni' har shai' kahāhi namuda shud ta'alluq yek 'ālam man wajh dar wujud ān shāi' yāfta khwāhad shud lekin hargāh az qalt tajriba wa ghalabat wahm sabab wujud hech-ka shai' nādir al wuqū' bar ahadī makhfī mishūd aksar auqāt dīgarī fursat tahsīl matlab khud yāfta wujud ān shai'rā mansūb ba-khwud namuda khudrā khāriqi 'adat wājibu'l-itā'at qarār mīdahad". *Tuhfatu'l muwāhhidin* (Persian). p.5.

3. *The Dabistān* (Eng. tr.) v.3. p.82.

4. "fabaqa anna al kaziba da'iru bainahum bilā t'ayunin". *Tuhfatu'l muwāhhidin* (Persian). Arabic introd.

to the philosopher emancipation is to be obtained only by the knowledge of truth in conformity to reason which is the greatest gift of God to mankind.[1] This view has been expressed by Rammohun not only in his *Tuhfat* but also in many of his other writings on religion afterwards.

Part of the section on Ilahi faith is in the form of dialogue or *manazara*.[2] Here are discussions between a Sunni, a Shia, and a Jew; between a Muslim and a Christian; between a Jew and a Christian; and lastly, between a philosopher (advocate of Ilahi faith), a Brahmin, a Muslim, a Zoroastrian, a Jew, and a Christian. Rammohun mentions at the end of his *Tuhfat* that he had composed another treatise entitled *Manazarātu'l adyān* (Discussions or debates on various religions). This work of Rammohun which was never printed, and which is supposed to be more detailed than the *Tuhfat*, is lost. Could it be that Rammohun was influenced by the *manazara* in the *Dabistān* and wrote his *Manazarāt* in line with that of the *Dabistān*? In the absence of the actual work this is impossible to confirm, but if he did take the idea and the theme from the *Dabistān*, it might solve a problem which puzzles many researchers: Why did some Zoroastrians take offence at his *Tuhfat*, which did not even mention

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1. "pas nazd 'aqul muttasif rastagari dar shinakhat haq ba mutaba'at farmān nabī kāmil sāhib namus akbar 'aql ast". Ibrahim ibn Nur Muhammad, (ed.) *Dabistān mazāhib*. Bombay, 1875. p.321.

2. See Vans Kennedy's "Notice respecting the religion introduced into India by the Emperor Akbar" in the *Transaction of the Literary Society of Bombay*. v.2. London, 1820. pp.256-286.

their religion?[1] The answer might be that the Zoroastrians did not take offence in the *Tuhfat* but in the *Manazarat*, which if it reflects similar, or somewhat similar views about Zoroastrianism to that of the philosopher in the *Dabistān*, would have been offensive to them.[2]

From the observations made above the following conclusions can be drawn: Before writing his *Manazarāt* and the *Tuhfat* Rammohun read a manuscript copy of the *Dabistān mazahib* - the well-known religious tract of the time, and became acquainted with various religions and their customs, ceremonies, dogmas, miracles, etc. He was interested in and might have been influenced by the logic of the Ilahi faith, and particularly by its reliance on reason and its avoidance of the supernatural. His *Manazarāt* and the *Tuhfat* were intended to be supplementary - one is the discussion and the other is the conclusion, the two together making a compact whole. The philosopher of the Ilahi faith used this technique. First

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1. *Jawāb Tuhfatu'l muwāhhidin* was written as a reply to the criticism by some Zoroastrians. See *Appendix A* for the tr. of the booklet with original text, introd. and notes. See also Dilip Kumar Biswas' article "Ramamohana Raya o Jawab-i Tuhfatu'l muwāhhidin" in *Tattvakaumudi* dated 1-16 Srāvana, 1376, p.82.

2. "You admit the existence of Yezdan and Ahriman" the philosopher said, "in order that Yezdan may not be said to be the author of the evil; but you also assert that Ahriman sprang forth from the evil thought of the all-just Lord; therefore he sprang from God, the All-Just. You are therefore wrong in the fundamental principle, the very root of your religion, and wrong must be every branch which you derive from it". *(The Dabistān*, Eng. tr. v.3. p.73). See also *Appendix A*, Introd.

he discussed with the advocates of various religions, showed their short-comings, and then he presented his own conviction. In the *Tuhfat*, Rammohun came to the conclusion that falsehood is common to all religions. This is what the philosopher established after his discussion with the followers of various religions. To prove the falsehood of all religions in the *Manazarāt*, Rammohun may have relied on the same, or similar arguments as those the philosophers used. One of Rammohun's later writings *Padarī o śishya sambāda* (published in 1823) reminds us of the dialogues between the philosopher of the Ilāhi faith and the advocates of other religions and particularly of the arguments and sarcasms he used.

The *Tuhfat* is a bold pronouncement by a decisive mind after its confused journey in the field of religion. Though the publication is not a part of Rammohun's programme of reformation,[1] yet the views expressed in it, formed, with some modifications,[2] the basis of his future religious ideas.

The Vedānta grantha and the *Upanishads*

Nearly twelve years after the *Tuhfat* in 1815, Rammohun published the *Vedānta grantha* - "The Bengalee translation of the Vedant, or resolution of all the Veds; the most celebrated and

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1. Rammohun's period as a reformer had yet to come.

2. In addition to the dictates of reason Rammohun afterwards recognised the authority of the scriptures.

revered work of Brahminical theology, establishing the unity of the Supreme Being, and that he is the only object of worship".[1] Then in quick succession appeared his *Vedanta sāra* (1815), and the translations of five Upanishads - *Kena* (1816), *Īśa* (1816), *Katha* (1817), *Māṇḍūkya* (1817) and *Muṇḍaka* (1819) in both Bengali and English.[2] His purpose was to awaken the Hindus "from their dream of error, and by making them acquainted with their scriptures, enable them to contemplate with true devotion the unity and omnipresence of Nature's God".[3] He had taken this path of action "which conscience and sincerity direct" knowing fully well that he had exposed himself "to the complainings and reproaches even of some of my relations, whose prejudices are strong and whose temporal advantage depends upon the present system".[4]

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1. Title page of the *Vedānta grantha*. See Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay (ed.). *Rāmamohana granthāvali*, Calcutta, (196-), p.2. This is in fact a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*, also known as *Vedāntasūtras*.

2. *Vedānta grantha* and *Vedānta sāra* were also published in Hindusthani.

3. *Translation of an abridgement of the Vedant*. Introd. In K. Nag and D. Burman (ed.) *The English works of Raja Rammohun Roy*. pt. 2. Calcutta, 1946. p. 60-61.

4. *ibid.*, p.61

The publication of the *Vedānta grantha* marked the opening of his role as a reformer,[1] and its introduction *(bhūmikā)* gave the outline of religious ideas he intended to pursue. He wrote that the teachings of the *Vedas* emphasised the ultimate reality of the *Brahman* who was the only Eternal Being.[2] No doubt the *Vedas* spoke of His immanence in everything, but that was no justification for regarding an object as *Brahman*, or for worshipping birds, beasts and stones as His symbols. He was aware of them who doubted the possibility of worshipping an unqualified, formless Being who could not be known by any human faculties. How then, he asked, could people all over the world worship Him without the help of idols or images?[3] Should a man who was separated from his father since his very childhood, and did not know him at all, take any person as his father whom he could see on the street? Or, should he often think of his father and pray

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1. "lokete Vedāntāśāstrera aprācurya nimitta svārthapara paṇḍita sakalera bākyaprabandhe ebaṃ pūrbbaśikshā o saṃskārera balete aneka subodha loko ei kalpanāte magna āchena e nimitta e akiñcana Vedāntaśāstrera artha bhāshāte ekaprakāra yathāsādhya prakāśa karileka". *Vedānta grantha, bhūmikā*, p.4. In *Rāmamohana granthāvalī*.
<u>Translation</u>: Due to non-availability of the scriptures among the people, and the consequent false interpretation of them by some self-interested theologians, and influence of tradition, many sensible persons even accept foolish practices as the dictates of the scriptures. To counteract such unfounded beliefs, this humble writer has tried his best to interpret the proper meaning of the scriptures in Bengali.

2. "sakala Vedera pratipādya sadrūpa parabrahma haiyāchena" *ibid.*, p.3.

3. "āścarya ei ye svajātīya bijātīya anekei nirākāra īśvarera uddeśye upāsanā karitechena ihā pratyaksha dekhitechena athaca kahitechena ye nirākāra īśvara tāhāra upāsanā konamate haite pāre nā". *ibid.*, p.5.

for his well being? Rammohun also discredited the arguments of the traditionalists who asserted that image-worship had been practised by ancestors and consequently it was not wrong to follow the custom. He argued that man, as a rational being, should not follow blindly or instinctively, like the animals, the activities of his predecessors,[1] but should judge the merits or demerits of his every action. The mention of image-worship in certain *Tantras* and *Purānas* was only meant for feeble-minded persons who could not comprehend anything without the aid of visual objects, but they had repeatedly asserted the oneness of *Brahman* and the worship of that Eternal Being as the way to liberation. In the *anushṭhāna*[2] he refuted the dictates of the puritans that it was wrong to explain and to hear the *Vedas* in any other languages than Sanskrit. "I ask them" he wrote "whether as a teacher they explain to their pupils the *śruti, smrti, Jaiminisūtra, Gītā, Purāna*, etc. in Bengali and whether the pupils listen to them".[3] As for those who believed that he was the only person in the world

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1. "kebala svabargera mata haya ei pramāne mata grahana karā paśujātīyera dharmma haya". *ibid.* p.5.

2. The *Vedānta grantha* is in three sections: *bhūmikā, anushthāna,* and *grantha.*

3. "Keho e śāstre prabrtti haibāra utsāhera bhaṅga nimitta kahena ye vedera bibarana bhāshāya karāte evam śunāte pāpa āche ... tāhādigye jijñāsā kartabya ye yakhana tāhārā śruti smṛti Jaiminisūtra Gītā Purāna ityādi śāstra chātrake pāṭha karāna takhana bhāshāte tāhāra bibarana kariyā thākena ki nā āra chātrerā sei bibarana śunena ki nā". *Vedānta grantha, anushṭhāna,* p.10.

who was advocating *Brahmopasanā* - the worship of an Eternal Being without name and form, Rammohun felt sad for the utter ignorance shown by them. Not only did the majority of people all over the world worship such a Being, but also in India the sects of Nānak, Dādū, Śivanārāyanī etc. practised this kind of worship. Moreover, venerable teachers of the past - Vedavyāsa, Bādarī, Vaśishtha etc. had taught us about *Brahman*, and the great Śaṅkarācarya had advised us of *Brahmopasanā*.[1]

In his *Vedānta grantha,* Rammohun did not follow fully Śankara's commentary as he did in the interpretations of the five *Upanishads* he published. In Śaṅkara's philosophy worship, meditation, adoration, devotion etc., have only secondary importance as they imply differential relationship between the worshipper and the object of worship[2] (i.e. between *ātman* and *Brahman*) which is contrary to his philosophy. Rammohun, on the other hand, gave an important place to worship (*upāsanā*).[3] This difference of emphasis was probably due to the difference in time and the changing need in society.[4]

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1. *ibid.,* p.11.

2. "Tathopāsyopāsakabhāvopi bhedādhisthāna eva". *Brahmasūtra, Śāṅkarabhāsya,* sutra 1.2.4.

3. "moksha paryanta ātmopasanā karibe". (Rammohun's commentary on 'ā prāyanāttatrāpi hi dṛṣṭam". *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.12). *Vedānta grantha*, p.101.

4. Treated in a later chapter.

The *Vedāntasāra*[1] is an abridgment of his *Vedānta grantha*. He published it for the benefit of those people who, he thought, would not be interested in such a long and difficult treatise like *Vedānta grantha*. Here again, he emphasised that according to the scriptures, *Brahmopasanā* was the only sensible religious practice for the Hindus, and at the end he wrote that all the evidence from the scriptures he had presented in support of his argument were, of course, of no value to those persons who had no respect for the authority of the *Vedas*, the teachings of Vedavyāsa, the commentaries of Śaṅkarācārya, or for the simple dictates of reason.[2]

The five *Upanishads* he published, were parts of a group of ten (*daśopanishat*) known as *Brahmavādī*, in contrast to other sectarian *Upanishads*. In his commentaries he followed Śankara.[3] He wrote that all the *Upanishads* he had commented upon, would undoubtedly show that the real cause of the universe was but One who is omnipresent and uncomprehensible, and whose worship was the chief duty of mankind for their liberation.[4] Though the *Vedas*, *Purāṇas*, and *Tantras* had

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1. Not to be confused with the Sanskrit work of the same title by Sadānanda Yogindra.

2. "Bedera pramāna ebam maharshira bibarana āra ācāryera byākhyā adhikantā buddhira bibecanā e sakalete yāhāra śraddhā nāi tāhāra nikata śāstra ebam yukti e dui akshama hayena". *Vedāntasāra*, p.[10]. In *Rāmamohana granthābalī*.

3. "daśopanishat ye mūla beda o yāhāra bhāshya bhagabāna Śaṅkarācārya kariyāchena tāhāra bibarana sei bhāshyera anusārete bhāshāte karibāra yatna karā giyāche". *Īśopanishat*, *bhūmikā*, p.[1]. In *Rāmamohana granthābalī*.

4. "ei sakala Upanishadera dvārā byakta haibe ye parameśvara ekamātra sarbbatra byāpī āmādera indriyera évam buddhira agocara hayena; tāhāri upāsanā pradhāna evam muktira prati kārana haya". *ibid*.

frequently asserted the plurality of the gods and goddesses, and different modes of their worship for the feeble-minded persons of insufficient understanding, they, no doubt, had affirmed repeatedly the incomprehensible One as the ultimate reality,[1] and the inferiority of image worship. To support his statement he quoted from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, *Kulārnavatantra*, and *Mahānirvānatantra*. According to the quotation from the *Viṣṇupurana* (First pt. 2nd chap.) - "God is without figure, epithet, defination or description ...", "The vulgar look for their gods in water; men of more extended knowledge in celestial bodies; the ignorant in wood, bricks, and stones; but learned men in the universal soul".[2] In the English preface[3] of the *Isopanishad*, Rammohun appealed to the good sense of his countrymen by asking them "whose advice appears the most disinterested and most rational - that of those who, concealing your scriptures from you, continually teach you thus, 'Believe whatever we may say - don't examine or even touch your scriptures, neglect entirely your reasoning faculties - do not only consider us, whatever may be our principles, as gods on earth ...' or that of the man who

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1. "Purāṇa evaṃ Tantrāditeo paramātmāke eka evaṃ buddhi manera agocara kariyā punah punah kahiyāchena". *ibid.*

2. "rupanāmādinirddeśaviśesanavivarjjitaḥ apaksayavināsābhyāṃ parināmārttijanmabhiḥ varjjita śakyate vaktum ya sadāstīti kevalam"
   also "apsu devā manusyānām divi devāmanīsīnām kāṣṭhaloṣṭeṣu murkhāṇām yuktasyātmani devatā"
   ibid. p.[2]. See also English preface of *Īśopanishad* in *The English works* pt.2. p.42.

3. Intended to draw the attention of the foreigners and other Indians beside the Bengali Hindus. English preface is longer than the Bengali version and has some additions.

lays your scriptures and their comments as well as their translations before you, and solicits you to examine their purport, without neglecting the proper and moderate use of reason ..."[1]

Controversies with the sectarians and the puritans

Rammohun's interpretation of the *Upanishads*, and his firm propagation of the idea that the ultimate reality is a Being who is One without a second, unqualified (*nirguna*) and beyond human comprehension, soon drew attention of Utsabānanda Bhattācārya, a devout worshipper of *Viṣṇu*. He wrote to Rammohun[2] that One Supreme Being of the scriptures which Rammohun mentioned, was no other than *Viṣṇu* who was not only superior to other gods and goddesses but even to *Brahmā* and *Maheśvara*, the other two members of Hindu Trinity. To support his view, Utsabānanda quoted from *Viṣṇupurāna*, *Nāradapancarātra*, *Mahābhārata*, *Bhagavadgītā* and also from some of the *Upanishads*. According to him the phrase *parameśvarah paramātmā* which the old *ācārya* Sankara used for his interpretation of the word *Īśa* was synonym of *Viṣṇu*.[3] Rammohun's reply showed his profound scholarship

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1. English preface of the *Īśopanishad*, p.48-49.

2. The correspondence between them is in Sanskrit and was published under the title *Utsabānanda Vidyābāgīśera sahita vicāra* (1816-17).

3. "ataeva vṛddhaiḥ Śrīśaṅkarācāryyapūjyapādaiḥ Īśāvāsyamidam sarvvam yat kiñca jagatyām jagat ityatra anupapadeśaśabdasya sankocamanabhipretya niratiśayatvena sarvvaniyantṛtvamadhyavasya Īśapadavyākhyāne parameśvaraḥ paramātmetiśabdābhyām Viṣṇureva sammataḥ". *Utsabānanda Vidyābāgīśera sahita bicāra*, p.9. In *Rāmamohana granthāvalī*.

and logical interpretation of the scriptures, and the confirmation of his observations on sectarianism which he made in the *Tuhfatu'l muwāhhidin*. He wrote that it was, no doubt, proper for a Vaishnava to try to uphold the supremacy of *Visnu*, and to interpret the scriptures with a sectarian bias to support his supremacy. But such claims could also be made by the *Śaivas*, *Śāktas*, and the *Sauras*. They could also interpret the scriptures to show the superiority of their deities *Śiva*, *Śakti*, and *Sūrya*. If the *Krshnopanishad* depicted *Visnu* as the Most High, so did the *Kaivalyopanishad* and the *Kālikopanishad* depict *Śiva* and *Śakti* respectively.[1] Thus the contention for supremacy of the deities gave rise to contradictory views among the sectarians and biased interpretations of the scriptures. The message of the ten main *Upanishads* was clear and above all contradictions. They told us of the existence of a *nirguna*, *nirākāra Brahman*. He was the Creator and Preserver of the Universe and His worship only was the sole duty of mankind. As for Sankara's interpretation of the word *Īśa*, Rammohun wrote that to take the phrase *parameśvara paramātmā* as synonymous to *Visnu* was nothing but a figment of Utsabānanda's imagination. There was no reason to think that the old *ācārya* intended it thus. Rammohun then showed the grammatical formation of *Īśa*, and gave its logical meaning.[2]

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1. "yadyevam brūse Krsnopanisadādīnām Visnuparānām śrutīnām daśopanisadīyaśrutibhih sārddham ekavākyatāyai sarvvasām śrutinām Visnuparatvam kathayāmah tarhi Kaivalyopanisadādīnām Śivaparānām śrutinām tābhirdaśopanisadīyaśrutibhih ekavākyatārtham yāvatīnām śrutinām Śivaparatvam śaivā kathayeyuh/ evam Kālikopanisadādīnām tābhirekavākyatārtham śāktādibhirapi Śaktyādiparatvena sarvvāh śrutayeh vyākhyātavyāh". *ibid.*, p.18.

2. "Īśā iti īste iti īt tena īśā īśitā parameśvarah paramātmā sa hi sarvvamīste sarvvajantūnāmātmā san svena ātmanā īśā āvāsyam..." *ibid.*, p.20.

Protest against Rammohun's assertion of *Brahmopasanā* came in the form of a long letter written in English by Sankar Shāstri and published in the *Madras Courier* of December 1816. He criticised Rammohun's appearance as a religious reformer[1] and his opposition to image worship. He asserted that the divine attributes were to be considered as virtual deities, and advocated image worship (*sākāra upāsanā*). In reply Rammohun published his *A defence of Hindu theism in reply to an attack of an advocate of idolatry at Madras* in 1817. With several quotations from the scriptures and by forceful argument he showed the validity of the views he maintained, and the weakness of his opponent's argument. He was not happy that discussions on Hindu theology between him and Sankar Shāstri should be in English instead of customary Sanskrit,[2] and he emphasised that he was by no means a 'reformer or discoverer' as the editor of the *Calcutta Gazette* suggested. He agreed with Sankar Shastri about the difficulty in attaining a knowledge of the 'Invisible and Almighty Spirit', but he did not agree with him to worship visible images instead, because of such difficulty.[3]

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1. The *Calcutta Gazette* mentioned Rammohun as a reformer.

2. "I beg to be allowed to express the disappointment I have felt in receiving from a learned Brahman controversial remarks on Hindoo Theology written in a foreign language, as it is the invariable practice of the natives of all provinces of Hindoostan to hold their discussions on such subjects in Sanskrit". *A defence of Hindoo theism* in *The English works*, pt.2. p.83.

3. "... the attainment of perfect knowledge of the nature of the God-head is certainly difficult, or rather impossible; but to read the existence of the Almighty Being in his works of nature, is not, I will dare to say, so difficult to the mind of a man possessed of common sense, and unfettered by prejudice, as to conceive artificial images to be possessed, at once, of the opposite natures of human and divine beings, which idolaters constantly ascribe to their idols". *ibid.*, p.87-88.

His opponent recognised divine attributes as deities and justified their worship under various representations on the ground of mental exercises for human race. Rammohun showed how the scriptures had mentioned idolatry as an inferior type of worship meant for the vulgar and other people who were not possessed of sufficient understanding. Moreover, if people all over the world could worship God without images, why not the Hindus?[1] He also wrote that Sankar Shastri's belief that the attributes of God existed distinctly from God, was not only contrary to Śaṅkarācārya's *advaita* philosophy but also to all the Vedānta doctrines.

Also in 1817 Rammohun published his *Bhattācāryera sahita bicāra* written in both Bengali and English.[2] It was in reply to *Vedāntacandrikā*, a treatise written in Bengali with an English translation[3] by Mrtyuñjaya Vidyālankāra, Head Pandit of Fort William College at Calcutta. The publication appeared "with the professed object of defending Hindoo idolatry against the arguments which I have adduced from the Vedanta and other sacred authorities"[4] Rammohun

1. "Permit me in this instance to ask, whether every Mussulman in Turkey and Arabia, from the highest to the lowest, every Protestant Christian at least of Europe, and many followers of Kabir and Nanak do worship God without the assistance of consecrated objects?" *ibid.*, p.89.

2. The English version entitled *A second defence of the monotheistical system of the Vedas* was meant for his European readers for whom "I have thought it advisable to make some additional remarks to those contained in the Bengali publication, which I hope will tend to make my arguments more clear and intelligible to them than a bare translation would do". Advertisement of *A second defence* in *The English works*, pt.2, p.97.

3. English title: *An apology for the present state of Hindoo worship.*

4. Advertisement of *A second defence*

showed the contradiction in his opponent's arguments[1] and with quotations[2] from *Brahmasūtra* proved that the *paramātman* (Eternal Being) was *nirākāra* and not *sākāra* as Bhattacaryya (i.e. Mrityunjaya Vidyālankāra) had suggested. The *Kenopanishad* in its 4th to 8th verses (*mantra*) had denied the divinity of any other being except of that Being who was beyond description and comprehension, and out of reach of the power of vision, hearing and smelling.[3] The great Śankara in the introduction of his commentary on the 4th verse had indicated that none of the popular gods - *Viṣṇu, Maheśvara, Indra, Pāvana* etc. were *Brahman* who was nothing but pure consciousness.[4] In reply to Bhattācaryya's assertion that it was not possible to adore *(upāsanā)* a Being who was beyond the conception of human mind, Rammohun wrote that the kind of adoration which he advocated in his writings was quite different from that of Bhattācaryya and his followers, i.e. the popular practice of offerings of flowers, leaves,

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1. "e paryanta Bhattācāryya Brahmake eka ebaṃ biśeshanarahita biśvātmā o tāhāra biśeshajñāna nirbbānamuktira prati kārana kahiyā Brāhmādi Durgādi ebam yābat nāmarupa carācara kebala bhramamātra kahiyā ekhana āpanāra purbbalikhita bākyera biruddha ebam Bedāntādi sarbbaśāstrera o Bedasammata yuktira biruddha yāhā kebala āpanāra laukika lābhera rakshāra nimitta likhiyāchena tāhāra bibarana likhitechie". *Bhattācāryyera sahita bicāra*, p.[7]. In *Rāmamohana granthābalī*.

2. 'arūpavadeva hi tatpradhānatvāt'. *Brahmasūtra* (3.2.14) 'āha hi tanmātram'. *ibid.* (3.2.16). etc.

3. "Kenopanishadera caturtha mantra abadhi ashtama mantra paryanta ei kariyā bārambāra kahiyāchena ye bākya mana cakshu ityādira agocara tehai Brahma hayena upādhibiśishtha yāhāke loke upāsanā kare se Brahma nahe". *Bhattācaryera sahita bicāra*, p.[8].

4. "Bhagavāna Śankarācārya Kenopanishadera bhāshyete caturtha mantrera abataranikāte byaktai kariyāchena ye lokaprasiddha Vishnu Mahesvara Indra Prāna ityādi Brahma nahena kintu kebala caitanyamātra hayena". *ibid.*

and viands and performance of different rites and ceremonies to please the deity.[1] It was no doubt true that to worship *paramātman* with Bhattacaryya's idea of adoration was impossible. "But should adoration imply only the elevation of the mind to the conviction of the existence of the Omnipresent Deity, as testified by His wise and wonderful works and continual contemplation of His power as so displayed, together with a constant sense of gratitude which we naturally owe Him, for our existence, sensation, and comfort, - I never will hesitate to assert, that His adoration is not only possible, and practicable, but even incumbent upon every rational creature".[2] About idolatry which Bhattacaryya tried to justify, he wrote that the prevalence of image-worship in Hindu society was due to the actions of self-interested people whose material gains depended on rites and ceremonies connected with such worship.[3] Moreover, the promoters of the worship of images, by promulgating anecdotes illustrative of the supposed divine power of particular idols, endeavour to excite the reverence of the people, and specially of pilgrims, who, under these superstitious ideas are persuaded to propitiate them with large sacrifices of money".[4]

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1. "Kintu Bhattācāryya o tāhāra anucarerā yāhāke upāsanā kahena serupa upāsanā sutarām paramātmāra haite pāre nā arthāta upāsanā kakhana manete kakhana hastete upāsyake nirmmāna kariyā sei upāsyera bhojana śayanādira udyoga evam tāhāra janmāditithite o bibāhadibase utsaba karā evam tahāra pratimūrtti kalpanā kariyā sammukhe nrttya karāna sutarām erūpa upāsanā paramātmāra sambhaba haya nā". *ibid.* p.[12].

2. *A second defence* in *The English works*, pt.2, p.115-6.

3. "Ye sakala loka edeśe śishta evam śāstrārthera preraka hayena tāhādera anekei pratimāpujāra bāhulye aihika lābha dekhiyā yathāsādhya uhāri pracāra karāitechena". *Bhattacaryyera sahita bicāra*, p.[19].

4. *A second defence* in *The English works*, pt.2, p.111.

In 1818 Rammohun published his *Gosvāmīra sahita vicāra* in reply to Gosvāmī's[1] eleven letters[2] asserting that the *Bhāgavata* of the Vaishnavas was the commentary of Vedavyāsa on his own *Brahmasūtra*, and consequently Vaishnavism had its sanction in the scriptures. To prove his assertion Gosvāmī quoted from the *Garudapurāna*.[3] Rammohun wrote in reply that Gosvāmī's claim had no foundation. How could the *Bhāgavata* depicting the life of Krishna in his childhood and youth, and describing his many joyful pranks with the *Gopis*, be the commentary of such a philosophical work as the *Brahmasūtra*? Which *sūtras* of the works illustrated the unusual and anti-social behavious of the personal god of the Vaishnavas?[4] Moreover, Śrīdhara Svāmī, whose advocacy classed the *Bhāgavata* as a *Purāna*, had never quoted in support of his arguments the passages which Gosvāmī mentioned as part of the *Garudapurāna*.[5] This only

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1. According to the editors of the *Ramamohana granthāvalī*, Gosvāmī's real name might be Rāmagopāla Śarmanaḥ.

2. "Bhagabadegaurāngaparāyana Gosvāmijī paripurna 11 patre yāhā likhiyā pāthāiyāchilena tāhāra uttara pratyeke deoyā yāiteche". *Gosvāmīra sahita bicāra,* [p.1]. In *Rāmamohana granthāvali.*

3. "arthoyam Brahmasūtrānām bhāratārthavinirnayaḥ
gāyatrībhāsyarupohasau Vedārthaparivrmhitaḥ
Purānānām sārarūpah sāksadbhagavatoditaḥ
dvādaśaskandhayuktohayam śatavicchedasaṃyutaḥ
granthohastādaśasāhasra Śrīmadbhāgavatābhidhaḥ"
ibid. p.[7].

4. "Vedāntera kon Śrutira ebam kon sūtrera artha ei sakala sarbbalokabiruddha ācarana haya". *ibid.* p.[9].

5. "Śrīdhara Svāmī yini Bhāgavatake loke Purāna kariyā biśvāsa karāiyāchena tinio erūpa Garudapurānera spashta bacana thākite ihā haite aspasta bacana sakala Bhāgavatera pramānera nimitta āpana tīkāra prathame likhitena nā". *ibid.* p.[7].

meant that those passages were nothing but compositions of the interested Vaishnavas, which were later interpolated in the *Garudapurāna*. According to Gosvāmī the interpretation of the *Vedānta* as a treatise on *nirākāra Brahman* and not *sākāra*, was a perversion of truth.[1] Rammohun confirmed that such was not only the interpretation of Śankara, but also the message of the *Vedānta* as could be seen by any sensible person from his quotations from the sources. Moreover, philosophers like Gotama, Kanāda, Jaimini, etc. had always stressed that the *Vedānta* was a monistic philosophy and none of them had spoken of *sākāra Brahman* in the form of Krishna as described in the *Bhāgavata*.[2]

The next controversy was with Kabitākāra,[3] who alleged that Rammohun had misinterpreted the *Vedānta* in order to destroy the Hindu religion, and his irreligious activities had brought famine and disease upon the country.[4] According to Kabitākāra *Brahman* was both

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1. "yadi kono Vedāntabhāshya abalokanera dvārā Brahma nirākāra emat jñāna haiyā thāke tabe se kujñāna". *ibid.* p.[2].

2. "Gotama, Kanāda Jaimini prabhrti anya2 darshanakāra yāhārā Vedavyāsera samakālīna ebaṃ bhramapramādarahita chilena tāhārā ebaṃ tahādera bhāshyakārerā yakhana āpana2 granthe Vedāntamatake utthāpana kariyāchena takhana advaitabāda baliyā Vedāntera matake kahiyāchena kintu āpanāra mate Śrībhāgavatera pratipādya sākāra gopījanaballabha ye parimitarupa teha Vedāntera pratipādya hayena emata keha kahena nāi". *ibid.* p.[10].

3. The real name is not known.

4. "Kabitākāra likhena ye ei sakala matera prakāśa haibāte lokera amangala o mārībhaya o manbantara haiteche". *Kavitākārera sahita bicāra*, p.[5]. In *Rāmamohana granthāvalī*. In 1815 Rammohun published the *Vedānta grantha*, and in 1817 there were outbreaks of smallpox and cholera in Jessore. Kabitākāra connected them as cause and effect.

sākāra and *nirākāra*, and it was necessary to worship a *sākāra* Being first before trying a *nirākāra*. In reply Rammohun published his *Kabitākārera sahita bicāra* in 1820. He denied that he had misinterpreted the *Vedānta*: he had only followed the great Śaṅkara. Instead of a vague general allegation of misinterpretation, could Kabitākāra point the mistakes out one by one?[1] He was not destroying the religion as Kabitākāra alleged, but merely reasserting the central message of the *Vedānta* which was as follows: the worship of *nirākāra Brahman* who was beyond all human comprehension. Rammohun laughed at Kabitākāra's allegation that his publications had caused outbreaks of famine and disease. What was the connection between a man's publication on God or on idolatry, and a natural disaster in the country? Long before he published his books Kabitākāra suffered from illness, and was involved in a defamatory case. Kabitākāra might even say that all his bad luck was due to Rammohun's publications and not the result of his own deeds.[2] He admitted that *sākāra* worship was necessary for persons who could not comprehend a *nirākāra Brahman*, but he emphasised the inferiority of such worship.[3] There were three types of worship -

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1. "Bedera kon sthānera biparīta bākyake āmarā kon pustake kon sthale likhiyāchi ihā Kabitākāra nirddishta kariyā likhena nāi". *ibid.* p.[1].

2. "ei sakala pustaka prakāśera aneka dina pūrbbe Kabitākārera roganimitta ebam mithyā apabāda dvārā dhanera hāni o mānahāni janme tahāteo bujhi Kabitākāra kahite pārena ye tāhāra svakarmmera phala nahe kintu anya kono byaktira grantha karibāra doshe ai sakala byāmoha Kabitākārera haiyāchila". *ibid.* p.5-6.

3. "cittaśuddhi haiyā Brahmajijñāsa nā haile karma o sākāra upāsanāra prayojana thāke". *ibid.* p.[12].

superior, medium, and inferior (*uttama, madhyama, adhama*). The worship of a *nirākāra Brahman (Brahmopasanā)* belonged to the first category, worship by sounds, i.e. chanting of *mantras* like the *Gāyatrī* belonged to the second, and the worship of mental images belonged to the third.[1]

In the same year (1820) Rammohun published *Subrahmanya Śāstrīra sahita bicāra* in Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi and English.[2] Subramanya Śāstrī advanced three assertions: (a) neither heavenly enjoyments nor final liberation can be attained by persons who had not studied the *Vedas*; (b) only he who had studied the *Vedas* was entitled to the knowledge of God (*Brahmajñāna*); and (c) one should perform the rites and rituals as prescribed in the *Śruti* and the *Smṛti* before aspiring to attain such knowledge.[3] Rammohun wrote in reply that the performance of their respective religious duties by each class was, no doubt, helpful to attain the knowledge of God, but it was not true that such performances were indispensable for that purpose. The great Vyāsa in his

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1. "asamartho mano dhātum nitya nirbishaye bibhau /
śabdaiḥ pratīkaircābhirupāsita yathākramam //
nity upādhiśunya sarbbabyāpi parameśvarete manake sthāpana karite ye byakti asamartha haya se śabdera dvārā kimbā abayabera kalpanā dvārā athabā pramitāra dvārā yathākrame upāsanā karibeka". *ibid.* p.[13].

2. English title: *An apology for the pursuit of final beatitude.*

3. "Bedādhyayana hīna byaktirdera svarga ebam moksha haite pāre nā, āra ye byakti Bedādhyayana kariyāche, tāhāri kebala Brahmabidyāte adhikāra, ebam Brahmajñāna janmibāra purbbe Bedokta ebam Smṛtyukta karmma abaśya karttabya haya". *Subrahmanya Śāstrīra sahita bicāra,* p.[2]. In *Ramamohana granthāvali*

Brahmasūtra had justified the attainment of *Brahmajñāna* even by those who had never practised the prescribed rites and duties, in the following two *sūtras: antarā cāpi tu taddrṣṭe* (3.4.36), and *api ca smaryate* (3.4.37). The celebrated Śaṅkara in his commentary on them thus concluded: "Even a person who professes no religious order, is permitted to acquire a knowledge of God, for it is found in the *Vedas* that Raikya, Bachaknavi, and others, who, like them, did not belong to any class, obtained divine knowledge".[1] Moreover, Vedic texts showed that Brahmavādinī, Maitreyī and others, who being women had not the option of studying the *Vedas*, were qualified to acquire divine knowledge.[2]

Kāśīnātha Tarkapañcānan, a resident of Calcutta published in *Samācara Darpana*[3] of 25 Caitra 1228 (6 April 1822) the following allegations in the form of four questions (*cāri praśna*) directed to Rammohun: (1) Recently a few *bhākta tattvajñānī*[4] under the

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1. *An apology for the pursuit of final beatitude*, in *The English works*, pt.2. p.124. Original Sanskrit text: "... evam prāpta idamāha - antarā cāpi tu anāśramitvena vartamānopi vidyāyāmadhikriyate
kutah? taddrsteh - Raikyavācaknavīprabhrtīnāmevambhutānāmapi Brahmavittvaśrutyupalabdheh" *Brahmasutraśāṅkarabhāsyam*

2. "Brahmavādinī, Maitreyī, prabhrti strī sakala, yāhādera Bedādhyayanera adhikāra kadāpi sambhaba nahe, tāhādero Brahmabidyāte adhikāra āche". *Subrahmanya Śāstrīra sahita bicāra*. p.[3].

3. Edited by John Clark Marshman, and published by the Serampore Baptist Mission.

4. Literally 'devotee theologian'.

influence of some unknown teachings of the scriptures, had denounced their own religion. Was it proper to communicate with such persons in society? (2) What was the use of wearing the Brahmanical thread for a so called *Brahmajñānī*[1] who was devoid of *sadācāra* (good deeds, i.e. religious duties) and *sadvyavahāra* (good behaviour)? (3) How could a respectable Brahmin who posed as a kind hearted *ātmatattvajñānī*[2] support violence in the form of killing goats and devouring their meat? (4) Recently some young people of respectable parentage, and with fashionable haircuts were indulging in wine and *yavani*[3] mistresses under the influence of bad companions.[4] Would not they be counted as a menace to society? In reply Rammohun published *Cāri praśnera uttara* in 1822. He agreed that it should not be proper for a religious person to communicate with a co-religionist who had disregarded his religion. But if that so-called religious person who could barely perform a fraction of his religious duties condemned

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1. Person conversant with the knowledge of *Brahman*.

2. Person conversant with the knowledge of self.

3. The word 'yavan' (fem. yavanī) used to mean the foreigners in the early period; was later used mainly for the Muslims.

4. "Aneka biśishta santāna yaubana dhana prabhutva abibekatā prayukta kusamsargagrasta haiyā lokalajjā dharmabhaya parityāga kariya brthā keśacchedana surā pāna yabanyādi gamane prabrtta haiyāchena". *Cāri praśna* p.[1]. In *Ramamohana granthavali*.

another person for not doing his duties properly and thus discarding his religion, then the allegation could only be a matter of fun.[1] Moreover, 'the influence of some unknown teaching' to which *Dharmasamsthāpanakāṅkhī*[2] (person wishing to defend and disseminate religious principles) referred in his allegations, was nothing but the teachings of *Pranava, Gāyatrī, Upanishads,* and *Smrtis* like Manu etc. As for the second question, he enquired in what context the two forms *sadācāra* and *sadvyāvahāra* were used. If they meant 'to perform all religious duties diligently as prescribed in the scriptures' then surely, a Brahmin who did not observe such duties, should be condemned, and he should not be entitled to wear the sacred thread. But if it so happened that *Dharmasamsthāpanakāṅkhī* himself did not perform all his religious duties, then how could he blame others for an offence which he himself committed?[3] If on the other hand, the

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1. "Kintu eka bhākta tattvajñānī o eka bhāktakarmmī ubhayei sbasbadharmera lakshāmśera ekāmśao anushthāna nā kariyā paradharmānushthānei bahukāla kshepa kare āra yadi tāhāra madhye oi bhāktakarmmī sei bhākta tattvajñānīke āpana apekshākrta nindita jāniyā tāhāra samsarge pāpa jñāna kare tabe se bhāktakarmmīra nindā kebala hāsyāspadera nimitte ebam pāpera nimitte haya ki nā". *Cāri praśnera uttara*, p.[1]. In *Rāmamohana granthāvalī*.

2. Assumed name used in *Cāri praśna*.

3. "Yadi āpana2 upāsanābihita ye samudāya ācāra tāhāi sadācāra sadbybahāra śabde Dharmasamsthāpanākānkhīra abhipreta haya tabe tāhākei madhyastha māni ye tini āpana upāsanāra samudāya ācāra kariyā thākena ki nā ... yadi tini āpana upāsanābihita dharmmera sahasrāmśera ekāmśao nā karena tabe tahāra ei ye byabasthā ye sbadharmera anushthāna nā karile yajñopabīta dhārana brthā haya ihāra anusāre agre āpana yajñopabīta tyāga kariyā yadi anyake kahena ye tumi sbadharmmera samudāya anushthāna karite pāra nā ataeba kena brthā yajñopabīta dhārana karaha tabe e katha śobhā pāya". *Cāri praśnera uttara*. p.[7-8].

two terms *sadācāra* and *sadvyāvahāra* meant 'to follow the way of the *mahājans* (noble persons, i.e. spiritual leaders) then there arose the question 'who are the *mahājans*?' Each sect had their own *mahājans*. To the Vaishnavas Gaurānga, Nityānanda, Rupadāsa, Śrīvāsa etc. were *mahājans*, whereas to the Śāktas Virūpāksha, Nirbbānācārya, Āgamavāgīśa, etc. held such position. So how could one judge another person by his own standard of *sadācāra* and *sadvyāvahāra*? In answer to the third question Rammohun quoted from the scriptures,[1] to show that there was nothing wrong in eating meat which had been duly offered to the gods and the ancestors. In answer to the fourth question he also justified drinking, meat-eating and sexual intercourse by quoting Manu[2]. But he emphasised that purposeless drinking of wine, etc. could cause endless sin as could be seen in the quotation "asaṃskṛtañca madyādi mahāpāpakaram bhavet", ascribed to Maheśvara, a sectarian god. As to the allegation of keeping a *yavanī* mistress, Rammohun agreed that to have any woman as a mistress was wrong, but if a man married a *yavanī*, or a woman of any other race or caste according to *Śaiva* law as mentioned in the *Tantras*, then that woman should not be counted as his mistress but his legal wife just like his other wife whom he married by the Vedic law.[3]

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1. "Devan pitṛn samabhyrccya khādān māmsam na dosabhāk". *ibid.* p.[10]. It is interesting to note that Rammohun justified his meat-eating by bringing in his argument *devān* (gods, i.e. deities) the existence of whom he did not believe.

2. "Na māṃsabhakṣane doso na madye na ca maithune". *ibid.* p.[12]. (There is nothing wrong in meat-eating, drinking and sexual intercourse if they were done according to rules of the scriptures).

3. "Yabanī ki anya jāti paradāra mātra gamane sarbbathā pātaka ebaṃ se byakti dasyu o candā la haiteo adhama kintu Tantrokta Saiba bibāhera dbārā bibāhitā yestrī se Vaidika bibāhera strīra nyāya abaśya gamyā haya". *ibid.*, p.[13]. "... the Śaiva marriage according to Tankrik rites which would be regarded today as tantamount to concubinage". R.C.Majumdar. *On Rammohan Roy*. Calcutta, 1972. p.42.

The controversy continued. *Dharmasamsthāpanakānkhī* published in 1823 the *Pāshandapīrana* (A torment to the irreligious) in reply to *Cāri praśnera uttara*. He critically examined Rammohun's each reply and with sarcasm and counter quotations from the scriptures, tried to prove the invalidity of his arguments. In reply Rammohun published *Pathyapradāna* (Medicine for the sick) in the same year. In its introduction he wrote that the *Pāshandapīrana* was full of rude and abusive words[1] improper in religious discussions. But for three reasons he would not reply his criticism in the same language: (a) such abusive words would place him on the same degraded level where they have placed the author of the *Pāshandapīrana*; (b) one should not be angry with sick children and animals who often protested loudly and even violently during their treatment; and (c) according to the *Bhāgavata*, a normal person should love his God, be friendly with his fellow-beings, be sympathetic to fools, and overlook the jealous.[2] So accordingly Rammohun should overlook the author of the *Pāshandapīrana* whose title should be *Dharmasamhāraka* (Destroyer of religious principles) instead of *Dharmsamsthāpanākānkhī* which he assumed. In the *Pathyapradāna*,

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1. "eirupa samagra pustaka prāya durbbākye paripūrna haya". *Pathyapradāna, bhumikā*, p.[1]. In *Rāmamohana granthāvalī*.

2. "Bhāgavate likhena (Īśvare, tadadhinesu, vāliśesu, dvisatsu ca/ pemamaitrīkrpopeksā yah karoti sa madhyamah) parameśbare prema, tahāra adhīna byaktisakalera sahita mitratā, murkha byaktidigye krpā, o dbeshtādera prati upekshā ye kare se madhyama haya". *ibid.*

Rammohun elaborated with many quotations, mainly from the *Smrtis*, his earlier justification of certain practices which be put forth in his *Cāri praśnera uttara*. Moreover, he emphasised that the performance of rites and duties were, no doubt, useful, but not pre-requisites for the study of *Brahman* as suggested by the author of the *Pāshaṇḍapīṛana*. The great Vyasa in the first *sūtra*[1] of the *Brahmasūtra* did not mention the need for such pre-requisites.[2]

Prārthānapatra, Pādrī o śishya sambāda, Gāyatryā Brahmopāsanāvidhānam, Brahmopāsanā, Brahmasangīta, and *Anushṭhāna*.

In 1823 Rammohun published *Prārthanāpatra* in both Bengali and English.[3] It was an appeal (*prārthanā*) to those who, on the authority of the *Vedas* believed that God who could not be known through the medium of language, thought, and vision, but who was the

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1. *"Atho Brahmajijñāsā"*

2. It depends upon the interpretation (*bhāsya*) of the *sūtra*. According to Śankara whom Rammohun followed, the study of *Pūrva-mimāmsā* (treatise which deals with rites and duties) is by no means an essential pre-requisite to the study of *Brahman*. (See *Brahmasūtra Śānkarabhāsya*, 1.1.1. - "Dharma-jijñāsāyāh prāg api adhita - Vedāntasya Brahmajijñāsopapatteh"). Ramanuja, on the other hand, points out that the *Karma-mimāmsā* and the *Brahma-mimāmsā* constitute one connected whole, the first naturally leads to the second. (See *Srī bhāsya* (1.1.1 - "Vakṣyati ca Karma-Brahma-mīmāmsayor aikaśāstryam").

3. English title: *Humble suggestions to his countrymen who believe in One true God.*

origin and support of the universe, was One without a second,[1] to manifest warmest affection to their fellow countrymen of similar views even though they had not studied the *Vedas*. Many of *Daśanāmā sannyāsis* and all the followers of Nānak, Dādu, Kabīr, and the Santas held those abovementioned religious sentiments.[2] The publication also appealed "to avoid using harsh or abusive language in their religious intercourse with European Missionaries, either concerning them or the objects of their worship".[3]

In the same year he also published *Pādari o śishya sambāda*,[4] a satirical tract in the form of a dialogue. It was a criticism against the beliefs of the Trinitarian Christians. Part of the dialogue was as follows:

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1. "ekamevādvitiyam Brahma". "Naiva vācā na manasā prāptum śakyo na cakṣuṣā/
astīti bruvatohanyatra katham tadupalabhyate".
Prārthanāpatra, p.[1]. In *Ramamohana granthavali*.

2. "Daśanāmā sannāsidera madhye aneke, ebam guru Nānakera sampradāya, o Dādupanthī, o Kabīrapanthi, ebam Santamatā ambi prabhrti, ei dharmmākranta hayena".
ibid.

3. *Humble suggestions*, Advertisement. In *The English works*, pt.2. p.199.

4. English title: *A dialogue between a missionary and three Chinese converts.*

"Missionary - ... But (addressing the 3rd convert) perverse as your two brethren are, you appear worse than they: what can you possibly mean by answering that there are no Gods?

3rd Convert - I heard you talk of three, but I paid more particular attention to what you said on the point of there being only one. This I could understand; the other I could not; and as my belief never reaches above my understanding (for you know I am no learned Mandarin) I set it down in my mind that there was but one God, and that you take your name of Christian from him.

Missionary - There is something in this; but I am more and more astonished at your answer - "None".

3rd Convert - (Taking up the Swanpan) Here is one. I remove it. There is none.

Missionary - How can this apply?

3rd Convert - Our minds are not like yours in the West; or you would not ask me. You told me again and again, that there never was but one God, that Christ was the true God, and that a nation of merchants living at the head of the Arabian gulf, put him to death upon a tree, about eighteen hundred years ago. Believing you, what other answer could I give than "None"?

Missionary - I must pray for you ..."[1]

In the *Gāyatryā Brahmopāsanāvidhānam* which was published in 1827 in Sanskrit with a Bengali translation (an English translation was also published), Rammohun explained with the help of quotations from the *Śrutis*, *Smṛtis*, and the *Tantras*, the way of Supreme worship *(Brahmopasanā)* by means of the *Gāyatrī* - *Om bhūrbhūvaḥ svaḥ tat saviturvareṇyaṃ bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt.* 'Om'

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1. *A dialogue between a missionary and three Chinese converts,* In *The English works*, pt.4. Calcutta, 1947. p.78.

signified that Supreme Being who was the sole cause of the creation, continuation, and destruction of the universe.[1] The doubt whether or not that cause signified by 'Om' existed separately from the effects gave rise to the second clause of the text: *bhūrbhuvaḥ svaḥ*, explaining that the sole cause eternally existed pervading the universe.[2] The third clause *tat Saviturvareṇyaṃ bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*, signified the dependance of living creatures on the sole cause - "We meditate on that indescribable spirit, inwardly ruling the splendid Sun, the express object of worship".[3] As all the three clauses of the *Gāyatrī* signified Supreme Being as their object, the repetition of the full text is recommended.[4]

In *Brahmopāsanā* (a small tract of 2 pages, published in 1828), Rammohun emphasised two aspects of religious performance: (1) a firm faith in the Supreme Being, and (2) good deeds and courteous behaviour to fellow-beings.[5] He also advocated to

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1. "Tatrādau 'Om' iti jagatyām sthitilayotpattyekakāranam Brahma nirddiśati". *Gāyatryā Brahmopasanavidhānaṃ*, p.[5]. In *Rāmamohana granthāvalī*.

2. "Idam lokatrayam vyāpyaiva tat kāranarūpam Brahma nityamavatiṣṭhate". *ibid.*

3. *Divine worship by means of the Gayatri.* In *The English works*, pt.2. p.79. "Dīptimataḥ suryasya tadnirvvacanīyamantaryāmi jyotīrūpam viśesana prārthanīyam". *Gāyatryā Brahmopasanāvidhānam* p.[5].

4. "Trayāṇāṃ mantranāmabhidheyasyaikatvādekatra japo vidhīyate". *ibid.*, p.[6].

5. "Manushyera yābat dharmma dui mūlake āśraya kariyā thākena eka ei ye sakalera niyantā parameśvarete nishthā rākhā dbitīya ei ye paraspara saujanyate ebam sādhu byabahārete kāla harana karā". *Brahmopasanā*, p.[1]. In *Ramamohana granthavali.*

meditate and contemplate on two axioms - *Om tat sat*[1] and *Ekamevādvitīyam*.[2]

Rammohun's *Brahmasangīta* is a collection of songs written by him and his friends and was meant to be sung during the worship (*upāsanā*). The subject matters are the supremacy of *Brahman*, the transitoriness of the world, and mankind's duty to the only Real *Brahman*. Some of his compositions express briefly but clearly his conception of the Supreme Being as could be seen from the following one: "*Mana yāre nāhi pāya nayane kemane pābe/ se atīta gunatraya, indriyabishaya naya/ rupera prasanga tāya, kirūpe sambhabe/ icchā mātra karila ye bisbera prakāśa, icchamātra rāke/ icchāmātra kare nāśa, sei satya eimātra nitānta jānibe/*"[3] The book was first published in 1828, and the first song ("*ke bhulālo hāya*") was sung in a meeting of the *Ātmīya Sabhā* in 1816.

Anushṭhāna[4] was published in 1829. Written in Bengali and translated into English, it is in the form of questions and answers, and deals with *Brahmopāsanā*, liberal attitude to other forms of worship, food and conduct according to the religious laws, etc.

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1. Only *Brahman* is true.

2. He is One without a second.

3. *Brahmasangīta*, p.[1]. In *Ramamohana granthavali*. *Calcutta Monthly Journal* in its May 1819 issue alleged that one of Rammohun's songs ("*Mana e ki bhranti tomāra*") had strange similarities with a Christian psalm ("What madness say hath seized your heart") written by Sternhold and Hopkins in the 16th century. See Ashokal Ghosh. "Ramamohana Rāyera ekati gāna". In *Tattvamaumudī*, Caitra 1379 B.S. p.256-260.

4. English title: *Religious instructions founded on sacred authorities*.

Each answer is backed by quotations from the sacred authorities. Worship (*upāsanā*) according to Rammohun "implies the act of one with a view to please another, but when applied to the Supreme Being, it signifies a contemplation of his attributes".[1] That Supreme Being is the author and governor of the universe, but except this neither the *Śruti* nor human reason could define His nature.[2] There are different types of worship, but *Brahmopāsanā* differs from the others in that except contemplating Him as the creator and preserver, it does not try to imagine that Being in a particular form or in a particular place.[3] But this difference does not cause any ill feeling among the *Brahmopāsakas*. Two essentials for such worship are: (1) to bear in mind that the author and governor of the universe is the Supreme Being, and to compare that idea with the sacred writings and with reason, and (2) to subdue the senses, and to read such passages as direct attention to the Supreme Spirit.[4]

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1. *Religious instructions*, In *The English works*, pt.2, p.129. "Tushṭira uddeśe yatnake upāsanā kahā yāya, kintu parabrahma bishaẏe jñānera ābṛttike upāsanā kahi". *Anushṭhāna*, p.[1]. In *Rāmamohana granthāvalī*.

2. "ihāra atirikta tāhāra nirdhārana karite ki Śruti ki yukti samartha hana nā". *Anushthāna*, p.[1].

3. "Yini jagatkārana tini upāsya ihāra atirikta abayaba ki sthānādi biśeshana dbārā nirupana kari nā". *ibid.* p.[3].

4. "Ei prataksha dṛśyamāna ye jagat ihāra kārana o nirbbāhakarttā parameśbara hana, śāstrata o yuktita eirūpa ye cintana tāhā parameśbarera upāsanā haya.
Indrīya damane o Pranaba Upanishadādi Vedābhyāse yatna karā e upāsanāra ābaśyaka sādhana haya". *ibid.*

Controversy with the Baptist missionaries

In 1820 Rammohun published his *The precepts of Jesus, the guide to peace and happiness*, and thus opened a new front[1] in his campaign. It was a collection of all the moral and spiritual precepts of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels, without the narratives of the miracles.[2] What induced him to publish the *Precepts of Jesus* was that according to him "This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of one God".[3] But the publication

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1. 'A firm believer in Christ' writes in the *Calcutta journal* dated 1 Aug. 1921 (p.405): "Next, he directed his attention to the Christian Religion; and the same just and honest use of his understanding, which discovered the falsehood and absurdity of Idolatry and Superstition, satisfied him that Jesus was the Messiah that he was employed by GOD to reveal his will to men, and to make known to them the only true Religion ... Blessed with the light of Christianity, he dedicated his time and his money not only to release his Countrymen from the state of degradation in which they exist, but also to diffuse among the European Masters of his Country, the sole true Religion - as it is promulgated by Christ, his apostles, and his disciples."

2. In the introduction of the *Precepts of Jesus*, Rammohun wrote - "For historical and some other passages are liable to the doubts and disputes of free-thinkers and anti-Christians, especially miraculous relations, which are much less wonderful than the fabricated tales handed down to the native of Asia, and consequently would be apt, at best, to carry little weight with them". (*The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, pt.v. Calcutta 1948, p.4).

   Rammohun's remark was proved to be prophetic. W.H. Sleeman in his *Rambles and recollections of an Indian official* (First published in 1844) gives the following conversations between Father Gregory and Major Godby who asked the priest how the Christian religion was making progress among the people. 'Progress"! said he, 'why what progress can we ever hope to make among a people who, the moment we begin to talk to them about the miracles performed by Christ, begin to tell us of those infinitely more wonderful performed by Krishna, who lifted a mountain upon his little finger as an umbrella to defend his shepherdesses at Goverdhan from a shower of rain".

involved him in a controversy with the Baptist missionaries.[1] The moral and spiritual portions of the Gospel, without the miraculous portions, were, according to the missionaries, insufficient for the purpose of human salvation. The controversy led to discussion of the doctrine of Trinity which Rammohun as a strict monotheist, would not accept. Trinitarianism to him was nothing but a form of polytheism and to believe in that doctrine was to deny the unity of God, and to commit the same mistake as that of the Hindus.

To refute the criticisms launched against him by the Baptist missionaries and to support his monotheistic view he published his first and second *Appeal to the Christian public in defence of 'The Precepts of Jesus'*. The *Calcutta Journal* in their issue of 1 August 1821, published extracts from the *Second Appeal*, which was sent to them by 'A firm believer in Christ', with a covering letter

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3. The *Precepts of Jesus*, Introd. (In *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*. pt.V p.4.)

1. This was, of course, a new turn of his relation with the Baptist missionaries. Up till now they praised his stand against the religion of the Hindus and gave liberal publicity of his views. Some interpreted his comments on Hindu religion as his pro-Christian attitude, some hoped for his conversion to Christianity. (Mrs. Harriet Newell, wife of an American missionary, wrote in her diary of 18 June 1812, that in Dr. Carey's house in Calcutta "we saw some of the native Christians. Ram-Mo-Hund was one". See *Memoirs of Mrs. Harriet Newell*. Edinburgh, 1821. p.144).

praising Rammohun's views on religion and his work of reformation. This drew fire from 'Layman'[1] who in a letter published the next day in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, denounced "with intolerant anger and fury" the extracts published in the *Calcutta Journal*. It seems Rammohun, under the assumed name 'Satya-Sadhun' (worshipper of truth) wrote a reply which the editor of the *Bengal Hurkaru* refused to publish. Rammohun sent it to the *Calcutta Journal* who published it in the issue of 15 August 1821, topped with a comment and under the heading 'A rejected letter'.[2] The characteristic logical argument in the letter, the style of writing, and the "mild and temperate spirit that pervades every line"[3] show that the author is no doubt, Rammohun. The last paragraph of this letter is rather interesting. It seems that the 'Layman' threatened Rammohun to take legal action against his denial of the divinity of Christ.[4]

During the controversy with the missionaries, William Adam, himself a Baptist missionary, was carried away by the logic of Rammohun's

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1. 'Layman' might be the assumed name of Dr. R. Tytler who soon afterwards became involved in a controversy with Ram Doss, i.e. Rammohun on the same subject.

2. The letter has been reproduced in full in Appendix B.

3. *Calcutta Journal* dated 15 Aug. 1821, p.563.

4. "I am not at all surprised at the reference of the LAYMAN to the penal statute against those that deny the Divinity of Christ, for whom Reason and Revelation refuse their support, <u>Force</u> is the only weapon that can be employed". (See *Calcutta Journal*, dated 15 Aug. 1821. p.564.).

argument. He openly professed his conversion to Unitarian doctrines, and "the poor man denied his God and Saviour, and is now a most decided infidel and scoffer at Divine revelation".[1] The incident caused great irritation "in a certain quarter, and the Attorney-General was applied to, to interpose the shield of some antiquated statute, to protect spiritual intolerance". But the Attorney-General assured the Bishop of Calcutta that "these days were passed",[2] and consequently William Adam remained in Calcutta.

The Baptist Missionaries indulged in very severe criticism. In their Bengali weekly *Samācāra darpana* (dated 14 July 1821), appeared a long letter criticising the beliefs of the Hindus, which prompted Rammohun to appear in a new role - the defender of Hindu religion. He sent a reply, but being refused by the editor of the *Samācāra darpana* publication of it in full, he published it in both English and Bengali with the title *The Brahmunical magazine, or the missionary and the brahmun, being a vindication of the Hindoo religion against the attacks of Christian missionaries.*[3] He defended the Nyāya, the Mīmāmsā, and the Sāmkhya systems of philosophy, and explained that *māyā* is the creating power of the eternal God, and it has no separate existence as an eternal object as the letter alleges.[4]

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1. *Dr. Wolff's journal*, p.44. Quoted in the *Christian Missions*, by T.W.M. Marshall. V.1. London, 1863, p.321.

2. Brajendranath Bandyopādhyay. "English impression of Rammohun Roy before his visit to England". In the *Modern Review*, March, 1932. p.280.

3. Bengali title: *Brāhmana sevadhi; Brāhmana o misinari samvāda.*

4. "The visible world is, as it says, created by Maya alone; and that Maya is opposed to a true knowledge of God . . . An admission of the truth of these doctrines either brings

It is the power of God "through which the world receives its birth, existence and changes", but these opinions do not imply the idea of "the inferiority of God to Maya, his attribute".[1] In reply to the allegation that the *Purāṇas* and *Tantras* have depicted God as possessing various forms, names and localities, and "though they acknowledge the omnipresence of a Being whom yet they allow to be possessed of form, wife, and children, subject to the senses",[2] Rammohun wrote that no doubt the *Purāṇas* have represented God in the form of a man and other animals, and as possessed of desires, but this representation of God is only for persons of feeble intellect who are unable to comprehend Him as without form and not subject to the senses. But the *Purānas* and *Tantras* have affirmed ever and ever again that in truth, God is without name, form, organs and sensual enjoyment. To support his argument Rammohun quoted three authorities - the commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*, Jamadagni as quoted by the *Smārtta*, and the *Mahānirvāna Tantra*.[3] He then brought some counter

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reproach upon God, or establishes the supremacy and eternity in some degree both of God and of Maya". (See *Brahmunical magazine*, In *The English works*. pt.2, p.141.

1. *ibid.*, p.146.

2. *Brahmunical magazine no.2*. In *The English works*. pt.2, p.153.

3. *ibid.*

charges against the beliefs of the missionaries. Do not the Baptist missionaries call Jesus Christ who was born and possessed of human form, the very God? Was he not afflicted with human passions, suffering and pain? Did he not eat and drink? Did he not live a long time with his mother, brothers and relations? Did he not die? If the missionaries "acknowledge all this then they cannot find fault with the Puranas".[1] Rammohun was reluctant to oppose any system of religion "much less Christianity".[2] But when the Baptist missionaries took all the corruptions of Hinduism as its standard and started their criticism, he thought that "a Hindoo would also be justified in taking as the standard of Christianity, the system of which almost universally prevailed in Europe previous to the fifteenth century of the Christian Era, and which is still followed by the majority of Christians . . . with all its idols, crucifixes, Saints, miracles, pecuniary absolutions from sins, trinity, transubstantiation, relics, holy water, and other idolatrous machinery".[3] He decided to attack the corruptions in Christian religion so that the Baptist missionaries might learn 'a lesson of charity' which they do often bestow on others. They often forget the precept given by their God; 'Do unto others as you would wish to be done by'. The precept implied, Rammohun reminded the missionaries that "if you wish others to treat

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1. *ibid.*, p.155.

2. *Brahmunical magazine no.4*, preface. In *The English works*, pt.2. p.171.

3. *ibid.*, p.185.

your religion respectfully, you should not throw offensive reflections upon the religion of others".[1]

Rammohun's forceful argument upholding the unity of God, and his criticism of the doctrine of Trinity, sparked off a controversy between Unitarians and Trinitarians among the Christians. In the *India Gazette* Dr. R. Tytler[2] violently attacked the Unitarians. According to him Unitarianism was nothing but 'blasphemy' and 'Satanism'. It is 'an open denial of the Father and the Son', it is 'the Antichristian enemy of man'. William Adam, the former Baptist missionary who was converted to Unitarianism by Rammohun's brilliant argument in its favour, replied to Dr. Tytler in a letter published in the *Calcutta Journal*, dated 7 September 1822. He wrote that Dr. Tytler "by indulging in intemperate railings gives the most satisfactory evidence that he neither knows what he says, nor whereof he affirms".[3] He thus defended Unitarians: "Unitarians profess to find nothing in the Gospel but what is entirely consistent with the plainest dictates of reason".[4] Soon afterwards, Rammohun

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1. *ibid.*, p.171.

2. "Surgeon in the Hon. East India Company's Service, Author of 'An enquiry into the Origin and Principles of Budaic Sabism', and of 'The Substance of a Discourse in Vindication of the Divinity of our Lord', and also, Member of the Asiatic Society". - Title page of Rammohun's *A vindication of the incarnation of the deity* . . . Calcutta, 1823.

3. *Calcutta Journal*, dated 7 Sept. 1822, p.94.

4. *ibid.*

himself was involved in a controversy with Dr. Tytler. Under the assumed name Ram Doss, Rammohun argued through his satirical writings that the belief in the incarnations of God and polytheism exists both in Hinduism and in the doctrine of Trinity, and therefore, the Unitarians with this belief in monotheism, are the common enemy of both the Hindus and the Trinitarians. Dr. Tytler of course, was not amused. He was infuriated by being grouped with the idolatrous Hindus, and he replied that Hindu idolatry and Unitarianism are the same, "they both proceed from *the Devil*".[1] The last letter of this controversy[2] came from "A Christian" who asserted that those who degrade the Christian religion "cannot comprehend its sublime Mysteries",[3] and he challenged Ram Doss to prove "that the human character has ever been exalted by any religious system so much as by the sweet influence of Christianity".[4] Ram Doss in reply wrote "I appeal to History, and call upon the Christian to mention any religion on the face of the earth that has been the cause of so much war and bloodshed, cruelty and oppression, for so many hundred years as this whose 'sweet influence' he celebrates".[5] No wonder, Bishop Heber in a letter (dated 16 Dec. 1923) to the Dean of St. Asaph wrote - "Our chief hindrances are some deistical Brahmins, who have left their own religion, and desire to found a sect of their own".[6]

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1. Dr. Tytler's reply to Ram Doss. In *The English works*, pt.4, p.60.

2. The controversy was renewed again after some time, but without any significant importance.

3. Letter of a Christian to Ram Doss. In *The English works*, pt.4, p.70.

4. *ibid.*, p.70.

5. Ram Doss's reply to the Christian. In *The English works*,pt.4.p.73.

6. *Narrative of a journey*. V.2. London, 1856. p.189.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRĀHMA SAMĀJ AND THE DHARMA SABHĀ

The Brāhma Samāj

After settling down in Calcutta in 1815, Rammohun formed the *Ātmīya Sabhā* - an association for people with views on religion similar to his own. It was closed soon afterwards due to the diminishing attendance of its members and Rammohun's involvement in a litigation. In 1821, he formed with William Adam, the newly converted Unitarian, the Unitarian Society where a Unitarian form of Christianity was preached and discussed. It seems that Rammohun was not very happy to be so closely associated with Christianity. So when a suggestion came from his Hindu friends for a place of worship of their own, it immediately appealed to him.[1] Accordingly, in 1828 he founded the *Brāhma Samāj*. But though he separated himself from the worship of the Unitarian Christians, there was no animosity between them. He wrote "We should feel no reluctance to co-operate with them in religious matters, merely because they consider Jesus Christ as Messenger of God and their Spiritual Teacher".[2] Moreover,

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1. "Eka dibasa sabhā bhanga haile tāhārā gṛhapratyābarttana karitechena, emana samaye Tārācānda Cakrabarttī o Candrśekhara Deba balilena ye, bideśīyadera upāsanāsthale āmādera yāibāra prayojana ki? Āmādera nijera ekatī upāsanā-gṛha pratishthā karā ābaśyaka/ Ei kathātī Rāmamohanera mane lāgila". Nagendranātha Cattopādhyāya. *Mahātmā Rāmamohana Rāyera jībanacarita*. Calcutta, repr. 1379 B.S.

2. *Humble suggestions*. In *The English works*, pt.2, p.200.

the congregational worship of the Christians had great attraction for Rammohun, and he modelled the *Brāhma Samāj* on this type of worship. "The reading of the *Vedas*, explanation (in Bengali) of the Upanishads, and songs, would correspond exactly to the reading of the Bible, the sermon and the singing of hymns, of Christian worship".[1] The object of worship in the *Brāhma Samāj* was "the Eternal Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe".[2] This Eternal Being should have no other designation (e.g. God, Allah, Vishnu, Hari, etc.,), nor there should be any image, statue or likeness of that Being. It was not meant for a particular sect, but was open to all "sorts and descriptions of people without distinction".[3] The *Brāhma Samāj* like the *Ātmīya Sabhā*, was also a meeting place of persons with similar views on religion, but unlike the *Ātmīya Sabhā* it was not planned by Rammohun though he founded it at the suggestion of his friends. And though it was a society of the worshippers of "the one God of all religions and all Humanity", in actual practice the congregation there "was a congregation of Hindu Theists using the rituals and symbols of that particular type of Theism".[4] After Rammohun's departure to England

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1. *The life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy.* p.245.

2. *The Trust deed of the Brahmo Samaj.* In *The life and letters,* Appendix 4. p.471.

3. *ibid.*

4. *Rammohun: the universal man,* p.23.

two years after its foundation, the *Brāhma Samāj* gradually turned to a sectarian institution.

The Dharma Sabhā

The orthodox Hindus under the leadership of Rādhakānta Dev, formed in January 1830 (5 Magh 1236) the *Dharma Sabhā* - an association to protect the Hindu *dharma* which "some persons of opponent faiths are trying to destroy".[1] One of the main aims of the association was to send an advocate to England to lodge an appeal to the King against Bentinck's law prohibiting the practice of *sati*. *Samācāra Candrikā*, a Bengali Weekly, became the organ of the *Dharma Sabhā*. It was edited by Bhawānī Charan Banerjee a one time close associate of Rammohun, who turned to be his opponent on the issue of *sati*. A letter in the *Samācāra Candrikā*, signed by Krishna Mohan Roy and eighteen others hailed the *Dharma Sabhā* as the association which would not only fight to protect the ancient Hindu traditions, but should also inflict proper punishment to "a certain person who wears sacred thread of the Brahmins but indulges in many un-Hindu practices".[2] The 'certain person' was no doubt Rammohun. When the news of his impending journey to England was known, a certain Mritunjay Das enquired whether there was any spiritual gain for a believer in Christ to die in London,[3]

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1. *Sambādapatre sekālera kathā*, v.1, p.269.
2. *Samācāra Candrikā*, dated 7 Vaisakh, 1237 (April, 1830)
3. *ibid.* dated 20 Kartik, 1237.

and 'a Brahmin of Barahanagar' tried to guess the purpose of Rammohun's visit to England as follows:[1] (1) to oppose the appeal of the *Dharma Sabhā* against the Anti-sati law, (2) to plead the case of the Emperor of Delhi to the Crown, (3) to obtain a suitable job as he is unemployed for a long time, (4) to acquire western knowledge, (5) to inform the condition of the country to the British public, and (6) to have a luxurious life in London. *Samācāra Candrikā* also published in verse *Dvijarājera khedokti*.[2] (lamentation of a high Brahmin). It traces how he (i.e. Rammohun) in his early life, was devoted to family deities and to Vaishnava rites. But soon realising that there was no honour without wealth, he learnt Persian for that purpose, and through Persian he became acquainted with the religion of the *javanas* (i.e. Islam) which he adopted in preference to his earlier religious conviction. He took to their customs and had a *javanī* mistress. They had a son Raja by name. He then learnt English and became acquainted with Christianity. Soon Jesus Christ became to him the creator, preserver and destroyer of the Universe. He discarded the *Koran* and the *moulavis* and *maulanas* appeared to him as nothing but deceivers. Next,a Brahmin explained to him the messages of the *Upanishads* and soon he became anti-Christ. Being an ambitious man he wanted to go to England as an envoy of the Mughal Emperor. But now he

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1. *ibid.* dated 24 Kartik, 1237.

2. *ibid.* dated 24 Kartik, 1237

felt sad to leave the country, family and friends. Who would look after him in that foreign land, who would care for him in his distress? The *Dharma Sabhā*'s attack on Rammohun, as could be seen, was more personal than logical religious controversy, and their promised defence of the Hindu *dharma* was nothing but the defence of the age old traditions and deep rooted orthodoxy against which Rammohun was fighting.

In November 1830 Rammohun left for England.[1] He was well received by the Unitarians who saw in him one fo the best and most distinguished judges of the claims of Unitarianism to be the original Christian doctrine".[2] He attended many congregations of the Unitarians but "it was his system to avoid so far identifying himself with any religious body".[3] In September 1833, Rammohun arrived at Stapleton Grove where he fell ill and died on the 27th of that month.

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1. "Baboo Ram Mohun Roy has taken his passage to England on board the Albion. (*Calcutta Gazette* dated 15 Nov. 1830, quoted in A.C. Das Gupta. (ed.) *The Days of John Company, selections from Calcutta Gazette, 1824-1832*) Calcutta, 1959. p.589.

2. Carpenter, Mary. *The last days of Raja Rammohun Roy in England*, London, 1866. p.71.

3. *ibid.*

CHAPTER V

RAMMOHUN'S RELIGIOUS IDEAS: ANALYSIS, EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Analysis

Rammohun's belief in One Eternal Being as the creator and preserver of the Universe, and his emphasis on the worship of that Being as the only sensible religious practice for mankind, has four distinct stages: (1) formation, (2) confirmation, (3) reformation, and (4) presentation.

In the first stage which constitutes his early life, Rammohun learnt Arabic and Persian, and through these two languages he came in contact with Islam - its orthodoxy, philosophy and culture. The rigid monotheism of Islam in contrast to the polytheistic rites and rituals of the Hindus, brought in him a new trend of thinking. He began to doubt the validity of the prevailing Hindu beliefs and practices, and the worship of family idols to which he was so devoted,[1] now seemed improper. The idea of One Being rather than a multitude of Gods appeared to him more rational than the idea which he had maintained so far. Deeper study brought him into contact with the thoughts of the rationalistic schools of Islam and that

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1. *The life and letters*, p.5.

of their philosophers who, influenced by Greek thought, were trying to explain the dogmas of religion in the light of reason. He studied the scholastic theology of that faith which developed as a result of controversy between the philosophers and the orthodoxy. Arabic and Persian literature also acquainted him with other religions and their customs, manners, dogmas, rites and rituals. During his 4 years of wanderings[1] in India and Bhutan and probably during his journey to Teshu Lumbo,[2] the border town of Tibet, he, no doubt, had come in contact with various sects and observed their different faiths and practices. His study and his experience with different faiths together with his understanding of their nature and working, made him realise that the majority of people in society followed their religion by habit. They did not use their judgement in matters concerning religion and followed the dictates of their religious leaders without question. Moreover, different religions each claiming superiority, caused not only rivalry but also fragmentation in society. Out of his observation on religion two main points became evident: (1) a firm belief in the unity of god, and (2) the evils of organised religion.

But Rammohun who was born in a Hindu Brahmin family and died as a Brahmin, would not be happy unless he found the approval of his monotheistic ideas in the Hindu scriptures. Moreover, he did not like the idea of reforming polytheistic practices of the Hindus

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1. *Rāmamohana Rāya*, p.5.

2. See Notes (no.7) in *Appendix A*.

by the monotheistic teachings of Islam. So he tried to find the confirmation of his idea in the Hindu scriptures[1] which he studied thoroughly. In a group of *Upanishads* which are known as *Brahmavādī*, Rammohun found the confirmation of his monotheistic ideas. In Śaṅkarācārya's commentary he found the most convincing conception of *Brahman* - the only Real. He was impressed by the commentator's rational approach, dialectical arguments, and splendid metaphysical conclusions. But coming nearly 800 years after Śankara in a society bewildered by different beliefs and confusing religious practices, he felt the necessity of some adjustments in Śaṅkara's philosophy to suit the need of his time. He observed in his society two main offshoots of Hindu mediaevalism. The first one was the Abstract Universalism of the popular Vedāntic schools "which denying all marks, notes, distinctions or differentiations in the Divine Entity, practically propound a kind of veiled Agnosticism on the one hand, and emphasise the abstraction of the senses from their objects, of the mind from thinking, of the emotions from feeling, of the will from acting, of man from society, as methods of spiritual culture, on the other".[2] The second was the prevailing ceremonialism of popular Hinduism which separated reason from life. Rammohun realised the importance of both intellect and emotion: intellect stirs in a human being an intense desire for knowledge whereas emotion inspires

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1. Rammohun regarded that the scriptures included not only the *Śruti*, i.e. the *Vedas*, *Brahmanas*, *Upanishads*, etc. but also the *Tantras*, *Purānas*, and the *Smṛtis* like Manu, Yājñavalkya etc.

2. B.C. Pal. *Character sketches*. Calcutta, 1957. p.3.

him to cling to some such being from whom he would be able to receive love, solace, and support. Moreover, Rammohun was well aware of the profound influence of the Bhakti schools.[1] The liberal tradition of Rāmānand, Kabīr, Dādu emphasising devotion as the only means of salvation and questioning the validity of meaningless formalism and practices, was also quite apparent. He therefore accepted both the transcendent and immanent aspects of *Brahman* and tried to work out a rational synthesis between the higher elements of the Śankara and the Rāmānuja schools of Hindu thought.[2] He adopted the teachings of Śankara to fight the sensuous ceremonialism of popular Hinduism but he never emphasised that portion of it which lends itself to the propagation of an out-of-reach, aloof *Brahman* indifferent to the worship of the devotees.

Rammohun's proficiency in the English language which he acquired in the meantime gave him access to Western thought particularly of the deists in Europe. Equipped with a very thorough knowledge of three religions - Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity, and acquainted with rationalistic thinking of both East and West, he, no doubt, stood in a very commanding position in his campaign against corruption and deception in religion.

The basic idea behind his reform was to strike a balance between the fundamental principles of the scriptures and the religious practices of the people. The religious practices (i.e. rites and

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1. Particularly the Caitanya movement in Bengal and Orissa.

2. This is by no means new. Śrīdhara Svāmi (14th cent.) attempted to combine the *Advaita* teaching of Śankara with the emotionalism of the *Bhāgavatas*. See Sushil Kumar De. *Early history of the Vaishnava faith and movement in Bengal*. Calcutta, 1961. p.17.

rituals) which are mainly based on human emotions and sentiments are susceptible to run amok without the controlling guide of the scriptures. So for a healthy religion, religious practice should follow the dictates of the scriptures. During Rammohun's times, the ignorance of the scriptures and the dominance of many self-interested priests gave rise to evil practices such as *sati*, female infanticide etc. in Hindu society. As a reformer Rammohun brought the scriptures to the reach of the people, interpreted them according to his ideas, showed the difference that existed between the theory and practice of Hindu religion, and gave a warning about the derogatory effect of such difference. These were his contributions to reform Hinduism and when judged in the context of a confused society overridden with tradition, orthodoxy, and misguided beliefs, they indeed, appeared remarkable.

With the formation of the *Brāhma Samāj*, Rammohun's role as a religious reformer was practically over. So far he had acted as a critic of religion. He had shown the faults of sectarianism, ridiculed the supernatural and the miracles in religion, criticised polytheism and idolatry in Hinduism, and denounced the Trinity of the Christians. In the process of controversy he had also evolved his own ideas on God and worship, and on the growth and evils of organised religion, and had forcefully propagated them. Was the foundation of the *Brāhma Samāj* for Rammohun the organised way in which these ideas should become realised in Hinduism? Some of his biographers think that the Trust-deed of the *Brāhma Samāj* contains the outline of a universal religion Rammohun intended to introduce.

He founded the *Brāhma Samāj* to be a place for the worship and adoration of the Supreme Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe, and only those sermons and prayers which "have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creed . . .".[1] should be allowed there. Miss Collet thought that the Deed was a bold statement, and "the infinitely diverse religions of the world will scarcely yield as their common denominator a Theism so pure and lofty as Rammohun's 'Universal Religion'."[2] It can be argued on the other hand, that Rammohun did not intend to introduce another faith even in the name of a fault-proof universal religion, and to add yet another to the sects which he criticised so much. The main aim of Rammohun's reformation in religion was to bring the message of the scriptures to the people and to warn them of the danger of overceremonialism, false beliefs and superstitious practices. The *Brahma Samaj* was formed at the suggestion of his Hindu friends, it

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1. *The Trust Deed of the Brahmo Samaj.* In *The Life and letters.* p.472.

2. *The Life and letters.* p.274.

was not planned by him, and the Trust-deed, as can be seen, is more a legal document than the constitution of a Universal religion.

The 'adoration of an Eternal Being' which Rammohun emphasised is the basic idea of all major theistic religions, and the idea had universality in the sense that it is common to all. Each sect has built up its own religious structure on this idea as the foundation, which together with the structure constitutes a religion. What Rammohun did in the way of reform is to bring out this basic idea and to remind the sectarians of the dangers of building a super-structure out of proportion to the base. Moreover, if Rammohun intended to introduce the *Brāhma Samāj* as the nucleus of a Universal religion free from all sectarian shortcomings, a person like him would have organised it better and not have left it in a dying condition,[1] only to be revived by Debendranath Tagore and later to be organised as a sect by Keshab Chandra Sen with a mixture of the very religious beliefs (including his *ādeśa*) against which Rammohun fought all his life.

Evaluation

Rammohun's conception of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable Being "who is out of reach of comprehension and beyond all description"[2] is similar to Śaṅkara's *nirguna* (unqualified, or

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1. "... I paid a visit to the Samaj on a Wednesday. I saw Dravidian Brāhman reciting the Upanishads just before sunset, in one of the side rooms of the Samaj. Ramchandra Vidyāvagish, Iswar Chandra Nyayaratna and one or two other Brāhmans were the only ones sitting there listening. Sudras were not allowed to attend". Devendranath Tagore. *The Autobiography*. London, 1914, p.66.

2. *Translation of the Ishopanishad.* In *The English works*, pt.2. p.41.

unconditioned) *Brahman*. He also accepted Śankara's identification of the *ātman* (Individual soul) with *Brahman*, his idea of *māyā* and the consequent unreality of the world.[1] But he did not agree with Śaṅkara that knowledge (*jñānayoga*) is the only means to liberation, and worship, adoration, etc., are only of secondary importance for the purpose. Instead, he advocated, like Rāmānuja, worship and adoration till liberation.[2] So while accepting *nirguna Brahman* as his concept of the Eternal, and the *ātman* as equal to and not dependant on *Brahman*, Rammohun yet advocated as religious duties such measures which did not logically fit to his own belief. How can the relation of worshipper (*upāsaka*) and worshipped (*upāsya*) develop if there is no difference between the *ātman* and *Brahman*? How can the sense of dependence which is essential for adoration and worship arise if the *ātman* and *Brahman* are equal? What does a *nirguna*, aloof *Brahman* care for the love and devotion of mankind? Śankara solved these problems by creating an inferior *saguna* (qualified, or conditioned) *Brahman* (Īśvara) who is the creator and preserver of this unreal world and himself a product of *māyā*.

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1. "I reply, that the resemblance of the bubbles with the world is maintained by the Vedanta only in two respects: 1st, as the bubbles receive from water through the influence of the wind, their birth and existence, so the world takes by the power of God, its original existence from the Supreme Being and depends upon him; and 2ndly that there is no reality in the existence either of bubbles or of the world". (see *The Brahmunical magazine*. In *The English works*, pt.2, p.145.

2. "moksha paryanta atmopasana karive" (Rammohan's commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.12) see his *Vedanta grantha* in *Ramamohana granthāvali*, p.101.

Rāmānuja did not face these problems. He formulated a philosophy of qualified monism (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) where *Brahman* is the ultimate reality but qualified with many auspicious qualities, the *ātman* is real and so is the world, and both are dependant on *Brahman*. Dependence on a benevolent Creator gives rise to prayer, worship, devotion, adoration, etc., which are quite logical in Rāmānuja's system. Rammohun realised on the one hand, that though Śaṅkara formulated a brilliant philosophy of the absolute he failed to form a theory of religion, and on the other hand that though Rāmānuja struck a balance between philosophy and theology, his qualified *Brahman* was susceptible to become a personal God followed soon by such religious practices as idolatry, excessive ceremonialism, etc., against which he was fighting. So he formulated his religious ideas which, though weak logically, were quite suitable to the need of the time. He qualified the *nirguna* Brahman as the creator and preserver of the Universe[1] and brought Him down from His out-of-reach location to the reach of mankind's love and devotion which he advocated for their liberation.

Conclusion

Reformation in religion is in a way the reinterpretation of the fundamental ideas in the scriptures to suit the need of the time, and to accomplish it a reformer should have a thorough knowledge

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1. The Brahman is the ultimate cause of the world but not its creator or preserver, according to Śankara.

of the scriptures, a clear understanding of the need, and an ability to interpret the scriptures to fit the need. In Hinduism the need for re-interpretation occurred to Śaṅkara, and Rāmānuja and in the 19th century to Rammohun.

During Rammohun's time degeneration in religion caused stagnation in the placid water of Hindu life which was soon distrubed by the force of oncoming western ideas. This distrubance brought to the surface the dirt and the many unwanted accretions which were taken by the Christian missionaries as Hinduism. But even in this period of confusion and despondency, there could be seen the emergence of progressive ideas. In the world scene, the advancement of science and the rise of rationalism made a mockery of the dogmas, miracles, supernaturals, etc. in human beliefs, and religion in general needed adjustment with the current trend of thoughts.

As a representative man Rammohun forcefully and effectively voiced the already existing feeling of dissatisfaction with the evils of society and tried to reform Hinduism by balancing its practice with its philosophy. He was deeply acquainted with at least three major religions of the world, and the ideas of the progressive schools in Islam and of the deists in Europe influenced him. He realised that on the basic idea of an Unknown Creator and mankind's dependence on Him, individual sects grew up with their own boundaries of separation resulting in a narrow, fragmented and individualistic religion, which often contained ideas contrary to the teachings of the scriptures. But he also realised that individuality gave incentive and a sense of identification. So what he hoped in

the way of reformation was not to abolish all sectarian religions and to establish one religion which would remove all marks of identification and form a broad, general platform for all, but to point out to the sectarians that their religious beliefs and activities should conform to the basic idea which was universal in nature and was the central theme of all the scriptures.

In the first half of his life Rammohun, like other members of the élite of his time, availed himself of the opportunity created by the Company's rule, to enhance his material prosperity and to establish himself in society. Though he had a deep interest in religion, his activities during this period were motivated more by self-interest than by anything else. The affluence with its resultant leisure which he acquired, prompted him to appear as a reformer, the role which dominated the second half of his life. It seems that his aim in reforming Hinduism was more utilitarian than humanitarian. His main aim was to create social and political opportunities for his countrymen. But the degrading religion of the country with some of its revolting practices which shocked the rulers in the country and abroad, appeared to be a hindrance, and the religion needed reform.

With a talent near to genius and a profound knowledge of the scriptures Rammohun presented his religious ideas to root out the unfounded beliefs of Hinduism and to show the meaninglessness of rites and rituals current at the time, but it is doubtful whether he intended his ideas should constitute the faith of a Universal religion replacing all the evils of sectarianism, as some of his

admirers claim. During his time when falsehood, prejudice, and superstition infested Hindu society in the name of religion, and even paralysed the thinking of sensible persons, Rammohun stood against the dark forces of orthodoxy, tradition and puritanism. He denounced false beliefs and meaningless ceremonialism of the community and brought to them the message of wisdom from the scriptures. He then departed leaving to the judgement of the people the course of their action.

In brief, Rammohun's idea of adoration and worship of a Supreme Being who is the creator and governor of the Universe, is the essence of all religions and universal in nature. He used it as a standard by which he examined the shortcomings of different sects, and particularly the excesses of 'popular Hinduism', but he never intended the idea to constitute an ideal faith of a new religion which would do away with the evils of all sectarianism.

Rammohun should be credited for his clear perception of the present, his vision of the future, and for his effort to adjust the present to accommodate the future which, he knew, was destined to come. In India's life and culture he welcomed new ideas. What he accomplished was not a synthesis of ideas - old and new, but a reappraisal of India's ancient faith and her judgement of values in the light of the new, and a reaffirmation of their place in the minds of modern men.

APPENDIX A

JAWĀB TUḤFATU'L MUWĀḤḤIDIN

"an anonymous defence of Rammohun Roy's *'Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin'* against the attacks of the Zoroastrians."

Translated with text, introduction and notes

INTRODUCTION

In 1803/4 Rammohun published his *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* - a Persian tract with an Arabic preface, which formed the very foundation of his future religious ideas. In this treatise he criticises, in a general way, sectarian religion. He points out the deception practised by the religious leaders, the irrationality of their doctrines, and their recourse to miracles and supernatural acts to impress the people of their infallibility, but his criticism is not directed towards any particular religion. At the end of the treatise he mentions that the subject, which has been dealt with briefly in the *Tuhfat*, has already been treated in detail in the *Manazarātu'l adiyān* ("Discussion on various religions"), his earlier treatise. Unfortunately, no copies of the *Manazarāt* could be found, and it seems that the treatise was never printed, though it is quite probable that a few copies of the manuscript were in circulation at that time. The *Tuhfat* seems to be the concluding part of the *Manazarāt*.

The *Jawāb Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* which has been translated here is an incomplete booklet of 16 pages. It is often ascribed to Rammohun. The original copy without a title page is in the British Museum Library (No. 14762.6.2(2), where it is described in the catalogue as "an anonymous defence of Rammohun Roy's 'Tuhfat . . .' against the attacks of the Zoroastrians".[1] This description seems to be fairly correct. The text shows that the anonymous author was an admirer of Rammohun, but not Rammohun himself. The author was disturbed by the attack

1. *A catalogue of printed Persian books in the British Museum*, ed. by E. Edwards. London, 1922, p.623

of the Zoroastrians, and when Rammohun did not take much notice of their criticism, he decided to take action himself. And so the *Jawāb* begins with an aggressive note against "A group of ignorant Zoroastrians" who have "ventured to compile a refutation of the *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin*". The question which naturally comes to mind is why the Zoroastrians in the first place tried to attack the *Tuhfat*, which did not mention their religion at all, not even by implication. One possibility could be that by attacking the *Tuhfat*, the Zoroastrians gave vent to the grudge which they sustained earlier. Another probable answer could be that the Zoroastrians took offence at Rammohun's earlier writing, the *Manazarātu'l adiyān*, which is a detailed discussion of the different religions, and that in writing the *Manazarāt* and also the *Tuhfat* Rammohun was influenced by the *Dabistān*, particularly by its chapter on Ilahi faith which believed that reason should be the main criteria for religious investigations.[1] According to an advocate of the Ilahi faith, as mentioned in the *Dabistān*, the fundamental principle of the Zoroastrian religion is wrong because of their assertion that two contradictory ideas - Yezdan (or Ohrmazd), the benevolent thought, and Ahriman, the evil thought - both spring from God. If Rammohum did express in his *Manazarāt*, a view similar, or, something similar to that of the advocate of the Ilahi faith, then there is no doubt that the Zoroastrians could take offence. Their

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1. "pas nazd 'aqul muttasif rastagāri dar shinakat haq mutaba'at farman nabi kāmil sāhib namus akbar 'aql ast' (*Dabistān mazahib*, ed. by Ibrahim ibn Nur Muhammad. Bombay, 1875, p.321). Translation:- Thus is become evident to the wise that emancipation is to be obtained only by the knowledge of the truth, conformably with the precept of reason, the greatest gift of God.

attack on the *Tuhfat* instead of the *Manazarāt* may be due to two reasons: firstly, they did not want to be involved in an argument concerning their alleged religious dogmas which, like the dogmas of any other religion, were difficult to defend; and secondly, they consequently preferred to confine their argument to vague general principles which might not involve them in an embarrassing position. They also indulged in personal attacks which only showed their weakness in the argument. They picked up the *Tuhfat* which, as mentioned before, is the general conclusion of the detailed *Manazarāt*. Moreover, the printed *Tuhfat* was better known to the public than the *Manazarāt*, which was probably in manuscript form and for that reason few copies of it were circulated. There are differences of opinion among scholars about the very existence of the *Manazarāt*. According to Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, whose research on Rammohun has brought to light much new information, the *Manazarāt* was never written, though Rammohun thought of writing it, or perhaps he wrote a part of it.[1] On the other hand, Moulavi Obaidullah el Obaide, who translated the *Tuhfat* into English, thought that the *Manazarāt* was written before the publication of the *Tuhfat*.[2] The Persian text of the latter confirms Obaidullah's view.[3] The *Manazarāt* and the *Tuhfat* were intended to be supplementary -

1. *Rāmamohana Rāya*, by Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya. Calcutta, 1960. (Sahitya sadhaka caritamala no.16), p.87.
2. *The Life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, by S. D. Collet, ed. by D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguly. Calcutta, 1962, p.35.
3. The verb 'namudam' which means 'I have treated' shows that he wrote his *Manazarāt* before the *Tuhfat*.

one is the discussion and the other the conclusion, the two together making a compact whole. It would not be surprising if the Arabic preface of the *Tuhfat* which the Zoroastrians criticised belonged originally to the *Manazarāt*.

There is another possibility. If the British Museum catalogue is correct, the *Jawāb* was published around 1820, and the interval between the publication of the *Tuhfat* and that of the *Jawāb* would be about 16 years. We do not know when the Zoroastrians wrote their refutation of the *Tuhfat*, but from the opening line of the *Jawāb* it would seem to be nearer to 1820 than 1804, the year when the *Tuhfat* was published. Moreover, from the text of the *Jawāb* (p.4, lines 10-11)[1] we can assume that their refutation appeared sometime after 1815 when Rammohun finally settled down in Calcutta. So it seems that the Zoroastrians attacked the *Tuhfat* at least 11 years after its publication. This suggests that they were not actually disturbed by Rammohun's treatment of religion in the *Tuhfat* (or the *Manazarāt*). If they were, they would have refuted it earlier. It appears that the motive for their antagonism was more personal than philosophical or theological. As their statements show, they indulged in personal abuse, and to give their personal attack the appearance of a theoretical argument they quoted some of Rammohun's remarks from the *Tuhfat*.

We do not know the extent of the criticism of the Zoroastrians[2] but we do find some of their allegations in the *Jawāb*. The anonymous

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1. ". . .the aforesaid author (Rammohun) did not go anywhere outside Calcutta, and since a long time Calcutta had been his permanent residence".

2. No copies of it could be found so far.

author of the *Jawāb* quoted the statements of the Zoroastrians to question their authenticity, to prove their falsity, and finally to vindicate the original premises of the *Tuhfat*. In the course of his argument he often used rude language and counter-attacked the religious dogmas and customs of the Zoroastrians.

According to Zoroastrian cosmology, the history of mankind begins with Gayomart. He was the First Man. He was semi-divine, being the son of Ohrmazd and his daughter and wife Spandarmat, the Earth. Thirty years after Ahriman, the evil spirit, invaded the material world, Gayomart died. Before dying he prophesied, "men will arise from my seed". The seed of the dying Gayomart fell into his mother, the Earth, and in due course the first human couple Mashye and Mashyane arose from her in the form of a rhubarb plant which later assumed the independent shapes of man and woman. But soon Mashye and Mashyane were influenced by the power of evil and proved themselves inept in carrying out their role in Ohrmazd's plan. Unlike Gayomart, who was sinless, his son and daughter had sinned against God and their sin had made them sexually impotent for 50 years. When finally they produced a pair of twins, Mashye and Mashyane did a monstrous thing. "So sweet were the children that the mother devoured the one and the father the other". Then Ohrmazd took away the sweetness of children from them "so that they might rear them and that their children might survive".[1]

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1. *Bundahishn* (Indian version), tr. in *The teachings of the Magi*, by R. C. Zaehner. London, 1965, p.78.

The anonymous author of the *Jawāb* in his defence of the *Tuhfat*, has counter-attacked the Zoroastrian critics and their religion. Who is this anonymous author? It seems he is not Rammohun. The language, style and the logic used in the *Jawāb*, have no similarity with that of Rammohun's *Tuhfat*. The *Tuhfat*, published in 1803/1804 is a scholarly treatise with a clear logic. On the other hand, the *Jawāb*, which was published nearly 16 years after the *Tuhfat*, and for that reason should have been more mature, had it been written by Rammohun, has no such qualities. Its language is anything but polite, and the arguments are based more on emotion than on logic. All through the text of the *Jawāb*, its author has referred to the Zoroastrians as foolish (balāhat), incarnate of ignorance (jahilan mujammad), shameless heretics (mulhid bi azarm) etc. He also criticised the Zoroastrian religion, pointing out the incestuous marriage and adultery among their gods. These rude words and the harsh attack on religion were not to be expected from Rammohun whose writings were always balanced and polite even under the greatest provocation from his opponents. In 1820, when the *Jawāb* was published, Rammohun published his *An appeal to the Christian public in defence of 'The precepts of Jesus'*. It is a reply to the criticism of the Christian Missionaries. In the face of a bitter and even personal attack by "A Christian Missionary", Rammohun is calm and cool and his language is nothing but polite and dignified. The whole controversy attracted the attention of the elite of that time, and Rammohun showed praiseworthy moderation. In an appreciation of Rammohun's *The second appeal to the Christian public* which was published in 1821, "A Christian" wrote in the *Calcutta Journal:*

"I cannot conclude without expressing my approbation at the candour and excellent temper shewn by RAM MOHUN ROY".[1] Commenting on this appreciation, the editor of the *Calcutta Journal* added "We agree entirely with our Correspondent in the high praise due to Ram Mohun Roy for his temper and moderation, and we esteem highly his zeal and intelligence".[2] A comparison between these two *Appeals* of Rammohun and the *Jawāb* of the anonymous author, would show the intellectual, cultural, and temperamental differences of the two authors.

Secondly, it is apparent from the text of the *Jawāb* that its author had a rather superficial knowledge of the Zoroastrian religion. Some of his allusions are wrong, and he has mixed up the Zoroastrian mythology with that of the Hindus. His reference to five brothers all married to one woman does not belong to Zoroastrian mythology, but to the Hindu epic *Mahābhārata*. Can Rammohun be guilty of such error and vagueness in his writings? The reply can only be in the negative. In his lifetime Rammohun wrote many letters, articles and treatises on many subjects. Each of his writings is marked by his clear, logical and scholarly ideas, and by his superior knowledge. Rammohun would not write unless he knew his subject well.

Thirdly, all through the text of the *Jawāb*, Rammohun is mentioned as a person different from the author, and as an object of respect and veneration. The author has nothing but admiration for Rammohun. Phrases like "the author of the *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidīn* -

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1. *Calcutta Journal*, No. 209, dated 2 Aug. 1821, p.420.

2. *ibid.*

may God grant him peace and security",[1] or, "a person who considers God as the real administrator of all the affairs of the Universe, and as omnipresent and omniscient, can never indulge in activities which might cause disturbances and disintegration of life in society",[2] show the improbability of Rammohun's authorship. Moreover, another comment by the *Jawāb*'s author that Rammohun "after perusing this work of the critics full of nonsense and absurdities, has observed in its refutation nothing more than the following dictum - 'The capacity of a pot can be judged by its appearance',"[3] clearly indicates that Rammohun is not the author of the *Jawāb*.

Lastly, the Quranic benediction - In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful ("Bismillah al Rahman al Rahim") - with which the *Jawāb* starts, does not conform with the pattern of Rammohun's other treatises. None of his writings opens with a benediction, and there is no reason to believe that the *Jawāb* is an exception.

The anonymous author, with his vague knowledge of the mythologies of the Hindus and the Zoroastrians, may have been a Muslim, perhaps a member of the staff either of the Sadar Dewani Adalat, or of the Persian department of the Fort William College in Calcutta. Since the beginning of the century Rammohun was closely associated with these two institutions, and here he was acquainted with Arabic and Persian scholars. The anonymous author was, no

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1. *Jawāb Tufatu'l muwāḥḥidin*, p.2, lines 2-3.
2. *ibid.* p.16, lines 3-4.
3. *ibid.* p.2, lines 3-4.

doubt, known to him. They discussed the criticism of the Zoroastrians and Rammohun observed in its refutation nothing more than the Arabic dictum mentioned above. But though he did nothing more, the anonymous author did not stop there. Due to "his regard for the respected author of the *Tuhfat*" he "decided to counteract the rudeness of these ignorant and heretic Zoroastrians", and therefore, he has "written some stray observations in the form of a fitting refutation to the criticism of those unworthy fellows who have, in their writing, heaped curses on the author of the *Tuhfat*".[1]

The criticism of the Zoroastrians is mainly directed to the Arabic introduction of the *Tuhfat*. In this introduction Rammohun puts forward his three main conclusions on religion - (a) Man's natural belief in the existence of one God. This conclusion Rammohun has deduced from his experience during his travels in the remotest parts of the world; (b) Man's natural belief in one God is changed by the circumstances in society and by the teaching of sectarians, resulting in the formation of different sectarian religions; and (c) The clear contradictions in the claim of each religion prove the falsity of all.

The criticism of the Zoroastrians, as can be gathered from the text of the *Jawāb*, is directed firstly against Rammohun's claim that he had travelled to the remotest parts of the world. This claim, according to the Zoroastrians, is false. They think that Rammohun did not go out of Calcutta, and so his alleged experiences are baseless, and consequently his conclusion also should be baseless. The second criticism is about the coexistence of contradictory ideas which, according

1. *ibid.* p. 2, lines 6-9.

to Rammohun, is not possible. According to the Zoroastrians, the coexistence of contradictory ideas might not be possible in one place and in one form, but if the places are different and the forms are not connected to each other, then in a particular time contradictory ideas can coexist. The third criticism is against Rammohun's statement that all (sectarian) religions are false. The Zoroastrians argue that if people discard religion on the conception that it is false, then the community will soon face moral bankruptcy. The religions are the source of all ethical laws and their removal will bring chaos in society.

The *Jawāb Tuhfatu'l muwāhḥidin* tries to refute these criticisms, and to uphold the conclusion of the *Tuhfatu'l muwāhḥidin.*

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18 - 19

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TRANSLATION

(Figures in parenthesis indicate page nos. in the original text).

(1) In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

A group of ignorant Zoroastrians has ventured to compile a refutation of the *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* although it is beyond their heretic minds to comprehend even the simplest argument in the treatise. This refutation is the outcome of their excessive indulgence in filthy types of polytheism,[1] their great addiction to their own religious tenets, their aversion towards monotheism, and their strong enmity against the believers of truth. They have also been misled by the love of their known objects of worship - cows, vultures, trees, stones, etc.[2] As a result of their lack of common knowledge and their ignorance of formal manners, they consider insinuation and abuse to be a reply to logical arguments, and misled by this belief they have boastfully written some senseless phrases (2) which are filled with obscene and derogatory language, and in a style which even a child who is learning the alphabet would be ashamed to follow. The author of the *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* - may God Most High give him security - after perusing this work full of nonsense and absurdities, has observed in its refutation nothing more than the following dictum - "The capacity of a pot can be judged by its appearance".[3]

This most humble writer, due to his devotion to monotheism and his regard for the respected author of the *Tuhfat*,

has decided to counteract the rudeness of these ignorant and heretic Zoroastrians. In the hope that men of sound reason will judge rightly, he has, therefore, written some stray observations in the form of a fitting refutation to the criticism of those unworthy fellows who have in their writing, heaped curses on the author of the *Tuhfat*.

Alas! it is a misfortune that when in a certain field (of knowledge) the most honoured learned men, because of their regard for the unimpeachable principles and correctness of the sound premises of monotheism, proceed cautiously,these hypocrites due to their paucity of knowledge and complete disregard for the punishment of God and the rebuke of the wise, venture to behave madly.(3)But people who have plunged themselves into the perils and dangers of infidelity and are engrossed in stupidity cannot be blamed for losing their balance of judgement and for not trying to get out of the whirlpool of sin. Most probably, the wish to elicit applause from impudent contemporaries has tempted them to undertake this venture.

The first objection of the degraded foul-mouthed critics is that "the author of the *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* in his introduction which he has written in Arabic, has said that he had travelled to various far off parts of the earth, but it has come to our knowledge from many inhabitants of Calcutta city, that but for a few places in Bengal, the aforesaid author did not go anywhere outside Calcutta, and for a

long time, Calcutta had been his permanent residence.[5] So he is wrong; his statement is wrong, and consequently his treatise is wrong. It is said that liars remember little. The author of the *Tuhfat* begins his treatise with a lie, and it is apparent that he has no other purpose than to perpetuate falsehood". Thus ends their allegation.

Without investigating the authenticity of the verbal reports which they relied on, the deceitful ones and the deceived both have become victims of their false belief.(4) Because of this they have not been able to reap benefits from the superior knowledge of the author of the *Tuhfat*. Otherwise, instead of believing the author's own statement about the occurrences of his daily life, they would not have relied on the evidence of some Calcutta residents, none of whom travelled with him, and many of whom were hostile to him due to their religious differences. Both the elite and common people would agree that a person should know more of the events of his daily life than anybody else. Also it is inconceivable that the author of the *Tuhfat* would relate his travels to different parts of the world merely for the sake of boasting and for exhibiting his excellence. It is well-known that spies and sailors travel to the far corners of the world more often than men of ability, but no one, for that reason only, should give them the credit of being wise and respectable. Also it cannot be conceived that the author of the treatise was motivated to falsehood(5) in order to substantiate his claim that

it was a natural tendency in human beings to turn to the original creator.[6] This assertion of the author can even be deduced in Calcutta where the opportunity of witnessing the manners and customs of diverse people and of comprehending the beliefs of the inhabitants of the far-away islands and mountains are so great that for that purpose, there is no need for an intelligent person to travel unnecessarily the land and the sea. What is more surprising is that these abusive critics have themselves acknowledged that the author of the treatise has travelled many regions of Bengal covering lands and mountains, and habitations of people holding conflicting views. Yet due to their weak judgement and their neglect of truth, they do not hesitate to accuse the author of falsehood for his statement that he travelled different parts of the world. The fact that the author travelled in the territories of Bhutan[7] and the regions of Hindustan outside Bengal,[8] can easily be known from his friends and from the officials of these governments. The allegation that Calcutta had been the home and residence of the author for a long time, is, therefore, baseless.(6)Moreover, learned men try to discover the truth inherent in a statement, and do not describe the details of the author's personal life of which they have no knowledge.

They (the Zoroastrians) have written that "the author of the treatise at the end of his Arabic introduction says 'whatever statement one makes, it is either true or false.[9] If it is true then it gives rise to the coexistence of two

contradictory ideas'".[10] End of the quotation. This proves the inherent weakness in the argument of the author. He seems to be unfamiliar with the knowledge of logic, and has merely heard of the phrase 'coexistence of the contradictory ideas' (ijtimā' al naqizin) not knowing the circumstances where such coexistence is not possible. We say that the coexistence of two contradictory ideas is impossible only in the circumstances where they are made to last at the same place and in the same form. For example, whiteness and blackness - the two contradictory qualities cannot coexist at one place and in one form. However, if the places are different and the forms are not connected to each other, then in a particular time, two contradictory ideas can coexist without any flaw.[11] This is equally true regarding the utterances of the earlier generations of all nations.(7) These utterances are assembled in the memories of the present day believers. Similarly, the teachings of the spiritual leaders of different religions who base their thought on divine revelation and inspiration, are true individually to their respective followers.[12] In the broad heart of the gnostics are accommodated the principles of all religions. They are not influenced by the contradictions in different religious principles, and they understand them correctly.[13] This understanding of the gnostics cannot be called a case of coexistence of two contradictory concepts". End of their writing.

God forbid! the regard for human intellect and the respect for scholarship do not permit us to indulge in academic discussions with those who are unable to comprehend the consequences of the presence of clear contradictions in matters of research, and who do not understand to what extent contradictions could be found in different religions. However, a counter-argument being necessary and a warning to unsuspecting persons being imperative, I write below a few lines.

It should be known that all intelligent persons agree that in matters which are self-evident, the presence of contradictory principles never occurs. On this basis, let us examine the following examples : Trinitarianism, according to some, denies the belief in God and those who profess this faith are infidels.(8) According to the opponents of this view, on the other hand, Trinitarianism accepts belief in God, and those who profess this faith are entitled to reach their goal. According to some the worship of fire is a filthy practice, while according to others, who think differently, there are great spiritual gains in fire-worship. It might happen that one sect considers a certain person as a prophet of God, while another sect of different belief might strongly assert that the so-called prophet is nothing but a liar. Are not all these views mutually contradictory? Is it possible to conceive that people have, as far as possible, investigated the truth of all these different views? It is evident that the leaders of religion and their followers, who propound these contradictory ideas, do not pay attention to the subtleties of time, space

and condition relating to them. The scriptures of all the religions assert their own beliefs without taking into consideration those of the others. Those who believe in a particular prophet, do not allow lies and sorcery to be attributed to him. In the same way, others who do not believe in the prophets and in their utterances, which are regarded by their followers as divine revelation, do not confine themselves to any particular time or condition when they seek to refute the prophethood.(9) Over centuries these contradictions have led not only to religious disputes and wranglings, but even to wars and killings between different religious sects. These wretched critics, in the early part of their writing, affirm that each sect denounces other sects because of its firm belief in and loyalty to its own faith. Thus their contentions lead to two alternatives. This accusation and denunciation of one sect by another is either true or false. In the case of the first alternative, i.e. if each sect rightly denounces and accuses the other of falsehoods, the invariable conclusion is that all the religions are false. In the case of the second, i.e. if each sect falsely denounces the other, we again come to the same conclusion that all the religions are false. However, the denial of such a conclusion, and the affirmation of contradictory premises, are nothing but the result of a lack of knowledge and experience, and consequently of their being fossilized.

In their third objection they write that "we follow the mujtahids in whom our forefathers believed, and we acknowledge the prophets and God's incarnations who are gods in

human forms and in the forms of the animals.(10) We are convinced in our belief because of our two mental states. Firstly, the spiritual, or ecstatic state which we attain only by the grace of God, and secondly, the state of obedience to the commands of the mujtahids of the past. The first leads us to affirm the truth of all religion without distinction. The second, on the other hand, prompts us to adhere to our own particular faith. Due to our firm belief in our own religion, in this state, we contradict and refute the religions of the others. These two different approaches neither amount to contradiction of two ideas, nor make us guilty of creating 'undue preferences' (tarjīḥ bilā murajjiḥ)". Here ends their statement.

These embodiments of ignorance and worshippers of gods in the form of wild animals, have no idea that in rational debates giving preference to a view, which lacks merit amounts to accepting the assumptions and not the truth based on the law of reason. In debates between followers of different faiths, religious argument and evidence based on ecstacy have no relevance. In brief, arguments based on the authority of a religion or on a mystic experience hold good only for those who believe in that particular religion or mystic experience. But those arguments cannot be presented as a decisive proof to those who neither believe in that religion nor in the mystic experience.(11) To present religious and mystical arguments to persons who have no faith in them, is nothing but sheer ignorance. It is surprising that these ignorant critics

assert that their notion of religious experience is based on their two mental states : (1) obedience to their own religion, and (2) their mystical experience. In the first case, i.e. when they obey their own religion, they contradict other religions because of their devotion to their own. This confirms the truth of the assertion of the *Tuhfatu'l muwāhhidin's* author that the religious belief of one sect contradicts that of the others. Secondly, they believe that they may obtain mystic experience through divine grace, and the experience thus gained induces them to confirm the truth of all religions. This assertion weakens the foundation of their own faith.(12) The conclusion that can be drawn from all their arguments is that so long as they are deprived of divine grace, they contradict the religious beliefs of the others because of their own fanaticism. Later on, when they receive the divine grace which leads them to their ecstatic experience, they begin to contradict their own religion and admit its falsehood. The faith in one religion makes it obligatory to contradict the religion of the others. Thus the acceptance of the truth of other religions makes the critics accept the falsity of their own. It is strange that the receipt of divine grace prevents them from contradicting other religions which the faith in their own religion makes obligatory for them. The natural cause would have been to the effect that the divine grace has made them firm and sincere in their own beliefs. It is more surprising that they believe that this attitude

of denouncing their own religion and upholding the truth of the others is prompted by divine grace.(13) What a shame that these ignorant critics, in order to show the superiority of their own religion over the others, present their own religion in defence of the arguments which are made against it! It is certain that they do not know the well-known principle that when there is no other item except one to choose from, the question of preference does not arise.

The summary of the argument which they present in refutation of the third point (made by the author of the *Tuhfat*), is as follows : "Overlooking the first two arguments, if we concentrate on the third, i.e. that every religion has some faults or other, it would mean that human beings are not bound to follow any moral law, leading to the disappearance of all distinctions between lawful and unlawful. As a result, the followers of the author of the *Tuhfat* will have freedom for sexual relations even with their mothers and daughters. According to the author, all the mujtahids are guilty of falsehood. But without their help we should not be able to distinguish between right and wrong, as they are our only source for such knowledge". End of the quotation.

These shameless heretics believe in the anecdotes of their own scriptures which relate how some of their great gods intended to commit adultery with their own daughters,[14] and how by a certain union the whole world originated.[15] Some of their other gods are also well known for similar sin.

(14) Further, they themselves assert that five brothers who occupy high places in their religion, were all married to one woman.[16] Thus, because of a large number of instances of vices mentioned in their religion, they do not hesitate to allege that mankind in general is guilty of committing adultery. Had it not been so they would have never talked of adultery with mothers and sisters in a logical discussion. Due to their profound ignorance and lack of experience, these heretics can not be distinguished from animals, and what I want to emphasise is that in making the distinction between good and evil, lawful and unlawful, they, like the animals, do not use reason, which is the greatest gift of God and is the source of natural inspiration. They do not bother about the rules of a good civic and political life, and they follow blindly the traditions of their own community. They always ignore the dictates of reason, which leads to nobility, and which in all circumstances is the guide of mankind and the essence of the superiority of human beings over the entire animal world. It is a great pity that these ignorant fools do not even know that the decisions about the question of what is lawful and unlawful in different religions are based on the opinions and judgements of the leading jurists of the respective religions. For instance, some religions say that the use of meat of certain animals is lawful in their belief, while others deny this (15) Similarly, a certain religion allows marriage between near relations, while others consider it unlawful. The difference in the practice of various religions

indicates the difference of opinion among the theologians. Who does not know the fact that Islam permits marriage between cousins, while the faith of the Brahmins (i.e. Hinduism) strictly prohibits it, so much so that the followers of the latter faith consider their female cousins as their own sisters. Similarly, Judaism permits one to marry the daughter of one's own sister, while Islam and Hinduism prohibit such a marriage. The followers of the last two religions consider the daughter of a sister as their own, and to marry her is unlawful. If these contradictory customs, which are given the status of religious laws are intended to evoke reverence simply by attributing them to God, then every formulator of law has equal right to claim divine origination for his law. Let it not remain a secret that the wise deem completely illegal all human actions which interfere with the spirit of unity in a particular community, when such actions relate to the problem of food and drink, or permanent and temporary marriages.(16) It is incumbent upon everyone to avoid all such activities as they cause interference in social life. A person who considers God as the real administrator of all the affairs of the Universe, and as omnipresent and omniscient, can never indulge in activities which might cause disturbance and disintegration of life in society. All those who attribute deceit, blind superstition and heresy to that person who is known to have been fighting against these vices for many years, could only bring such an allegation out of their bigotry and stupidity.

A little thinking would show that only those who, in order to attract people on their side, have been making claims that they can show miracles, and that they are endowed with divine powers, can be accused of fraud, deceit, and lies. But a person like the author of the *Tuhfat*, who does not believe in miracles, who considers himself a most insignificant creature of God, and who advocates the use of reason in scientific enquiries and writings, cannot be accused of the above-mentioned vices. Also, the answers to numerous questions, such as the investigation into miracles, the dissolution of the world in its creator, the refusal to worship anything but God, etc. . . . (incomplete)

NOTES

1. This allegation of polytheism and idolatry is more appropriate to Hinduism than to Zoroastrianism. The original teaching of Zoroaster was monotheistic though, according to some scholars, it has a dualistic trend. Some time during the 5th century B.C., the old polytheistic religion of Persia crept back into the religion of Zoroaster, and some of the old gods were readmitted. In the later liturgical literature of Zoroastrianism, we find the worship of divinities other than Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord. "We worship the Wise Lord who is associated with Truth, the Judge of Truth; we worship the Bounteous Immortals (Amesha Spentas) whose kingdom is good, the beneficient". (*Gāthā Haptanhaiti*, tr. in *The dawn and twilight of Zoroastrianism*, by R. C. Zaehner, London, 1961. p.63). Moreover, many Vedic gods, such as Indra, Mitra (Mithra), Varuna (Ahura) etc. appear in the *Avesta*. This shows the close relationship of the two scriptures and also their polytheistic tendencies.

2. All these, again, are objects of worship of the Hindus. In Zoroastrian cosmology, Gosurvan, the Primal Bull is one of the original creations of Ahura Mazda. From this Primal Bull arose the animals and plants of the world. In the consecration ceremonies of the present day Zoroastrians, the presence of a white bull (*Varacyo*;

Skt. *Vṛṣa*) is part of the ceremony, but it is not an object of worship. Birds such as vultures serve a very useful purpose in disposing the dead of the Zoroastrians; plants in the form of Haoma plant (like Soma of the Vedic times) gives them "the drink of immortality"; and a slab of stone is used in many of their ceremonies, but none of them are their object of worship.

3. The full sentence establishes that Rammohun is not the author of the *Jawāb*.

4. The translation of the Arabic text is as follows : "I have travelled in the remotest parts of the world, in plains as well in hilly lands". (*Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidīn*, by Rammohun Roy, tr. by Moulavi Obaidullah el Obaide. Calcutta, 1884. Introduction). In an autobiographical letter (the authenticity of which was challenged and refuted) published in *The Athenaem* (no.310, dated 5 Oct. 1833, p.666) Rammohun wrote : "I proceeded on my travels, and passed through different countries, chiefly within, but some beyond, the bounds of Hindostan, with a feeling of great aversion to the establishment of British power in India". Dr. Lant Carpenter in his biographical sketch of Rammohun mentions that "he (Rammohun) at last determined at the early age of fifteen, to leave the paternal home, and to sojourn for a time in Thibet, that he might see another form of religious faith". (*The last days in England of the Rajah Rammohun Roy*, ed. by Mary Carpenter.

London, 1875, p.2). According to Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya, Rammohun's movements and activities cannot be traced during the years 1792-96 (See his *Rāmamohana Rāya*. Calcutta, 1960. p.45. (See also Note No.7).

5. Towards the close of the year 1815, Rammohun permanently settled down in Calcutta. (See *The life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, by S. D. Collet, ed. by D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguly. Calcutta, 1962, p.17).

6. Rammohun wrote in the introduction of his *Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin* " . . . it has been known to me that turning generally towards One Eternal Being, is like a natural tendency in human being, and is common to all individuals of mankind equally". (Moulavi Obaidullah's translation).

7. The first contact of the British Indian Government with Bhutan was in 1772, when the dependent state Cooch Behar asked for help after being over-run and occupied by Bhutanese troops. The Indian Government sent a force "consisting of four companies of sepoys with two pieces of cannon". Bhutan entreated the assistance of the Tibetan authorities, and Tashi Lama, the regent of Tibet and guardian of the Dalai Lama, wrote a letter to Warren Hastings, then the Governor-General of India, requesting a cessation of hostilities. A treaty of peace was signed in April, 1774, and in May of the same year Mr. George

Bogle, a gentleman of "distinguished ability and remarkable equanimity of temper" was deputed to the court of the Tashi Lama. A second mission was deputed under Captain Turner in 1783. Since 1768 the British had shown interest in Morang, the Terai area of East Nepal and Sikkim, as a source of ship timber, and they watched with concern the gradual encroachment of the Gurkhas into this valuable source of raw materials. In 1814 when all attempts at negotiation failed, Lord Moira decided for a war with Nepal which was a Chinese tributary at that time. To know how the war with Nepal would affect the Chinese, it was necessary for the British to establish some sort of dialogue with them through Lhasa. Accordingly, David Scott, the Collector of Rangpur, was instructed to try to establish contact with Lhasa, either through Sikkim or through Bhutan. David Scott's attempt to get in touch with Lhasa through Bhutan did not succeed. However, in January, 1815, he sought from the Bhutanese authorities permission to send an agent to their capital and thence to Lhasa. The Bhutanese seemed willing enough to receive this mission, but the envoy sent, Kishen Kant Bose, failed to get into Tibet. (For a detailed study see *Britain and Chinese Central Asia*, by Alastair Lamb. London, 1960. p.1-53).

From the letter no.140 in *Prācīna bāṃlā patra saṅkalana*, ed. by S. N. Sen, we understand that Rammohun accompanied

Kishen Kant Bose to Bhutan, but instead of staying there with Kishen Kant he went back to India, as he was instructed, to convey to David Scott the result of their talk with Deva Raja, the Prime Minister, concerning the war with Nepal and Bhutan's attitude in the conflict. According to Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya (see his *Rāmamohana Rāya*. p.32-34). Krishnakānta (i.e. Kishen Kant) was deputed to settle some existing boundary disputes with Deva Raja, and Rammohun was entrusted with a political mission to accomplish - that of persuading Bhutan not to help Nepal in her battle with the British. According to Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguly, the editors of S. D. Collet's *The Life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (p.40-41), it is doubtful that Rammohun went to Bhutan as an assistant of Krishnakanta Bose as suggested by S. N. Sen. They think that Rammohun may have had a superior status to that of Krishnakanta's, and they conclude : "It is permissable to imagine that the Bhutanese Mission of 1815 laid the foundation of Rammohun's subsequent reputation as a diplomat".

Alastair Lamb in his *Britain and Chinese Central Asia*, mentioned above, shows that the main aim of Kishen Kant Bose's mission was to establish contact with Lhasa, and that he failed to get into Tibet. He quotes from David Scott's despatch to Adam dated 24 September, 1816 that

Kishen Kant Bose "seems not to possess all the discretion requisite for such an employment". It may be asked why David Scott did not depute somebody else for such a diplomatic mission? The answer may be found in another despatch of David Scott (dated 21 Sept. 1821), quoted by N. K. Barooah in his *David Scott in North-East India* (New Delhi, 1970, p.34) - "no capable person but himself (Kishen Kant) could be found to undertake the business". So it appears that David Scott did not think that Rammohun had more diplomatic ability than Kishen Kant.

This seems that Kishen Kant was entrusted with three objectives - (a) to open up a line of communication with Tibet via Bhutan; (b) to settle the border dispute between Bhutan and Cooch Behar; and (c) to check the reports of a Bhutanese military threat which had been current in 1815. He failed in his first objective, but was successful in the second. And, after his meeting with Deva Raja, Kishen Kant found that the reports of a military threat was baseless. He sent this message together with a personal letter from Deva Raja to David Scott through Rammohun, who accompanied Kishen Kant to Bhutan. It seems unlikely that Rammohun was entrusted with a political mission, but it seems likely that he was selected to assist Kishen Kant because of his previous experience in the Cooch Behar - Bhutan border disputes (in 1809 and again in 1811, Rammohun accompanied John Digby to settle the disputes), and of

his previous knowledge of this region.
This brings us to the controversy of Rammohun's journey to Tibet. It is probable that during his four years of wandering (1792-95), Rammohun travelled through this rather inaccessible territory of Bhutan, which he described as "the remotest part of the world". He may have gone to the border of Tibet, or even to Tashilumpo, the seat of Tashi Lama. There was already a caravan route to this place, and in 1786, Poorungeer, the Hindu mendicant who was the guide to both Bogle's and Turner's mission, reported "that many merchants had already found their way from Bengal to Teeshoo Loomboo". (see *Report on Bhootan*, by R. B. Pemberton. Calcutta, reprint 1961, p.8).

8. Sometime in 1800, Rammohun went to Patna, Benares and a few other places outside Bengal and returned to Calcutta before the end of the year. (See *Selections from official letters and documents relating to the life of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. by R. Chandra, and J.K. Majumdar. Calcutta, 1935. v.1. p.XXXVI).

9. This quotation is out of context. The actual statement is as follows "Some of these sectarians are ready to confute the creeds of others owing to a disagreement with them, believing in the truth of sayings of their

predecessors; while those predecessors also like other men were liable to commit sins and mistakes. Hence either all these sectarians (in pretending the truth of their own religion) are true or false". (*Tuhfatu'l muwāḥḥidin*, tr. Obaidullah. Introduction).

10. Rammohun's argument, which follows the logic of 'excluded middle', seems to be that some sectarians claim that only their religion is right while that of the others is wrong. This claim of each of the sectarians, according to Rammohun, is either true or false. If it is true then each religion becomes both right and wrong, which is contradictory and therefore unacceptable. If the claim is false, then follows the inevitable conclusion that falsehood is common to all religions.

11. The Zoroastrians argue that in certain circumstances two contradictory ideas can coexist. It seems that in their argument they try to justify the existence of two contradictory ideas in their religion - Ohrmazd and Ahriman, the light and the darkness, the good and the evil - both of whom originated from God. As mentioned in the introduction, it is probable that Rammohun's *Manazarātu'l adiyan* might have prompted the Zoroastrians to criticise his *Tuhfat*.

12. Consequent to their belief that contradictory ideas can coexist in different forms and in different places, the Zoroastrians argue that each religion is true in its own area and to its own followers though contradictions exist between different religions. These contradictions do not prove the falsity of the religions, but, on the contrary, they show the individuality of each.

13. According to the Zoroastrians, the contradictions between different religions are apparent in a narrow view, but in a broader view these contradictions fade away and all religions become true.

14. The reference might be to Ohrmazd and Spandarmat, the father and the daughter, whose union produced Gayomart, the first man (See Introduction). It is said that in early Zoroastrian community next-of-kin marriage (khvetuk-das) was counted as specially meritorious. According to the Pahlavi text *Dadistăn-i-Dinik* (chapter LXV, para 2), the first next-of-kin marriage was that of Mashye and Mashyane who were brother and sister. The later Zoroastrians assert that Khvetuk-das refers to marriages between first cousins.

15. This refers to the union of the first human couple Mashye and Mashyane.

16. The allusion is not clear. It seems that the author of the *Jawāb* has mixed up Zoroastrian mythology with that of the Hindus. He may refer to the five Pandavas of the Hindu epic *Mahābhārata*, all of whom married Draupadi.

APPENDIX B

CALCUTTA JOURNAL. Wednesday, August 15, 1821.

A Rejected Letter.

The mild and temperate spirit that pervades every line of this intelligent Native's Rejected Letter, as compared with the intolerant anger and fury of the LAYMAN's denunciation, to which it is a Reply, and which was so readily ACCEPTED by the HURKARU that it was published in breathless haste in one of the Evening or Extra Sheets, will convince our Readers of the utter worthlessness of all the empty professions of the Editor of that miserable Paper; and shew them that he is incapable of the exercise of that impartial justice, which the interests of Religion, and the amelioration and improvement of the Natives of India demand. He can find space for the lowest and most contemptible writings from day to day, directed against "THE JOURNAL," - (seemingly now the only subject on which either himself or his Correspondents can bestow a thought; for we have seen neither Letters nor Editorial remarks that have not had "THE JOURNAL" for their theme, for we know not how many days past) - and at the same time denies to a Native of learning and talent the insertion of such a Letter as the present, to the tone and spirit of which the

most furious Bigot could not reasonably object. This production of a Native Indian, will be read in England with admiration of its temper and composition, as indicating the refinement of the mind that give it birth; although it has been rejected by the narrow and contracted spirit of one calling himself an Englishman, yet proving by this act, how much he is inferior in understanding and in liberality, to this enlightened Hindoo.

The following is the Rejected Letter:-

To the Editor of the *Bengal Hurkara.*

Sir,

Having in a late number admitted into your pages some very serious remarks on a Publication by Rammohun Roy, I trust that you will in justice to him give a place to the following Reply: - I am, Sir, your obedient Servant

SUTYU-SADHUN.

To the Editor of the Bengal Hurkaru.

Sir,

I saw a letter written by "A LAYMAN" in your Paper of the 2nd instant, on the subject of a letter and Extracts from a late Publication of RAMMOHUN ROY's, given in the Calcutta Journal of the preceding day. The tone of resentment

and asperity which runs throughout the whole Letter, indicates plainly that the LAYMAN was actuated in his mode of expression and reasoning rather by momentary passion than by cool judgment. His principles as a Christian will, I hope, upon mature consideration of the subject, serve more effectually to make him aware of the uncharitable spirit which pervades his Letter, than a reply couched in a similar style of expression.

The LAYMAN declares, in the concluding part of his Letter, that "Religious Controversy is the last article that should appear in a Periodical Publication;" yet with great inconsistency he fills almost two columns with religious argument, a short notice of which I beg now to offer.

RAMMOHUN ROY observes, in his Appeal that "if it was a practice among the Christians to study the Old Testament first and then the New, Christianity would not be liable to be encroached upon by human opinions;" The LAYMAN, in noticing this assertion, affirms positively that "in the very first chapter of Genesis, the Trinity in Unity is distinctly avowed;" but he does not refer to the passage or text in which the avowal of Trinity in Unity may be found: I regret to say that, for my own part, so far from being able to discover such ~~avowed~~ avowal, I cannot find the least allusion to Trinity, nor even a word expressing the number Three in any part of the chapter.

I am aware, however, of the arguments by which this supposed avowal is inferred; and would beg the LAYMAN's patient attention to the discussion of them in RAMMOHUN ROY's Appeal, page 96. In noticing the following assertion of RAMMOHUN ROY, found in the Extract, "What credit can be obtained in proving one is not three, and the same Being cannot be God and Man?" the LAYMAN questions him, whether he can explain how the soul and body make one man? how we feel them, distinct though united? and then concludes, that if RAMMOHUN ROY believes these things without being able to explain them, he should not reject the mystery of the Trinity in Unity though beyond comprehension. The LAYMAN would not, I suppose, draw such a conclusion in a cool moment, were he to pay attention to the following passage, found in the same Extract from the Appeal of RAMMOHUN ROY, that appeared in the Calcutta Journal: "It is too true to be denied, that we are led by the force of the senses to believe many things that we cannot fully understand; but when the evidence of our senses does not compel us, how can we believe what is not only beyond our comprehension, but contrary to it and to the common course of Nature, and directly against Revelation, which declares positively the unity of God as well as his incomprehensibility, but no where ascribes to him any number of persons or any portion of magnitude?". Let the LAYMAN point out first where and how the force of the senses, or any mathematical

administration, depending also upon the senses, compels us to believe Trinity in Unity, and the union of God and man, as it does with regard to the soul and body; and let him shew such Revelation as ascribed to God any number of persons and any portion of magnitude, and then put the above questions to RAMMOHUN ROY, and require him to believe the mystery of Trinity in Unity, which is not only beyond our understanding, but also contrary to it.

As the LAYMAN states, "that such a person as Christ did exist, and that he did those things which are recorded of him in our Gospel, is admitted both by the Jews and Mohammudans," I must beg to remind him that though the Jews admit that such a person as Jesus lived, they utterly deny that he Christ has appeared, as they still expect Christ or Messiah (which is synonymous with Christ) for their final delivery. Mussulmans, also, though they admit the existence of Christ, yet deny his most meritorious work, I mean his death on the cross, and class him as a prophet much below the rank of Mohummud.

The LAYMAN recites the extracts from Locke and Newton, and thus interprets them as the declared proofs of the Trinity. "The Saviour is allowed by Locke to be our Lord and King and by the term Lord and King the spiritual Lord and King must be meant, which is the strongest expression, for the Deity of the Saviour. I have no doubt that by the term Lord and King the spiritual Lord and King is understood;

but I cannot see what relation these titles bear to the Deity of Jesus; Divines are called spiritual Fathers, and the Pope was acknowledged some hundred years ago by almost all Christians, and is at the present age considered by a majority of Christians, as their spiritual King. So also the Bishops of the British Parliament were in the time of Locke, and still are termed spiritual Lords; but neither Divines in general, nor the Pope himself, nor the Bishops of England, can therefore be considered as bearing titles that imply their being possessed of the divine nature. The LAYMAN might perhaps have been better justified, according to the Trinitarian mode of arguing, in drawing this conclusion from the language of Locke, did we not meet with the phrase "promised and sent from God," added to the term "our Lord and King;" or had he found the words "from the Father," instead of "from God," as no one will scruple to confess that a Being promised and sent by any other Being, must be considered distinct from and subordinate to the Being by whom he is said to be promised and sent.

Again,the LAYMAN infers from the words of Newton, that as he represents it be the duty of Christians to worship God and the Lamb, that great man must have believed in the divinity of Christ; for that if the Lamb is not God, such worship is idolatry. He neglects to notice the distinction made by Newton between God and the Lamb; for while he represents God receiving worship as sitting upon his throne and living

for ever and ever, he considers the Lamb as exalted above all by the merits of his death. It is no idolatry to worship the Lamb with that idea of his nature; but it would be of course idolatry, according to Sir Isaac Newton's views, to worship the Lamb as sitting upon the throne and living for ever and ever. The subject of worship offered to Christ is fully discussed in RAMMOHUN ROY's Appeal, page 48.

As to the offence of publishing the sentiments that appear so very obnoxious to the LAYMAN, I may observe what I believe to be the fact, that RAMMOHUN ROY, as a searcher after the truths of Christianity, did keep the result of his enquiries to himself, and contented himself with compiling and publishing the pure Precepts of Jesus alone, as he thought these were likely to be useful to his countrymen in the present prejudiced state of their minds against Christianity. But on the publication of these Precepts, he was unexpectedly, in some Periodical Publications, attacked on the subject of the Trinity, and he was consequently obliged to assign reasons for not embracing that doctrine.

I am not at all surprised at the reference of the LAYMAN to the penal statute against those that deny the Divinity of Christ; for when Reason and Revelation refuse their support, Force is the only weapon that can be employed. But, I hope the English nation will never exhibit the disgraceful spectacle of endeavouring to repress by such

means, opinions, for the truth of which the authority of the Bible itself is appealed to by my countrymen.

I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

SATYA-SADHUN

Calcutta.

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